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# LEGACY

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

## Ryan Nevius



## The Importance of State-Level Education Associations: Advocating for Quality Education

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## The Importance of State-Level Education Associations: Advocating for Quality Education

Ryan Nevius, Executive Director, Illinois ASCD

Associations serve as critical voices between stakeholder groups such as educators, policymakers, and the community, ensuring that teachers and students are heard and that the educational system's needs are met. As the Executive Director of [Illinois ASCD](#), I have risen through the State Level Education Association ranks. Through my work at Illinois ASCD, I've had the honor of seeing firsthand how educational policy is shaped, how to advocate for educators, design and provide cutting-edge professional development and develop hard-hitting publications.

State education associations have a long history in the United States, originating in the mid-19th century as organizations aimed at improving the quality of education and supporting teachers. Illinois ASCD shares a long and illustrious history, starting as one of six original ASCD affiliates in the 1940s. According to former Illinois ASCD Executive Secretary Don Kachur, our Affiliate history predates the ASCD affiliation. The group initially started as a group of Curriculum Supervisors traveling via horse and buggy through the Illinois prairie back in the days of the one-room schoolhouses. These Curriculum experts would provide instructional support to local teachers and principals. Images of Abe Lincoln traveling the judge circuit in the 1800s always come to mind when I picture these humble beginnings. Since the Gilded Age, Illinois ASCD has grown into a state-level Association with the mission of helping educators develop their skills and knowledge, aiming to improve students' learning and achievement across the state. The organization seeks to promote effective teaching and leadership practices, foster professional growth, and advocate for high-quality educational opportunities for all learners.

### Our Professional Learning Program Offerings

One of the association's most critical functions is facilitating professional development for educators. Illinois ASCD believes that education without quality professional development is malpractice. High-quality professional development is the influence driver that makes all Illinois ASCD's focus area work possible. Therefore, every professional development opportunity offered by Illinois ASCD is modeled after the indicators of quality professional development:

- ✓ *it focuses on deepening educators' content knowledge and pedagogical skills (InPraxis, 2006)*
- ✓ *it includes opportunities for practice, research and reflection*
- ✓ *it is embedded in educators' work and takes place during the school Day*
- ✓ *it is sustained over time, and*
- ✓ *it is founded on a sense of collegiality and collaboration among teachers, and between teachers and principals, in solving important problems related to teaching and learning"*

George Evans once said, "Every student can learn, just not on the same day or the same way." Adult learners are no different. Our members come from affluent districts, urban inner cities, and rural farm towns. Regardless of location, the challenges are consistently growing, and professional development goals often fall down the priority list. We feel our responsibility as the Provider is to meet our audience at their level and availability! Workshops, meetings, institutes, cohorts, and conferences must have a wide variety of depth, delivery, and entry points. Members are looking for different experiences at each level of training. For example, a small group cohort allows participants to analyze topics at a deep level with one-on-one attention. On the other side of the coin, you have large national and state-level conferences attended by thousands of people and a la carte variety of topics. One learning style isn't "better" than the other; both experiences are vital to a well-rounded Professional Development calendar. Allow me to share an example of how the different approaches made a noticeable difference in the lives of our members.

[Empowering Visionary Curriculum Leadership](#) is an innovative professional development Cohort designed to support new and veteran Administrators as they create and implement high-quality, student-centered curricula. Over five days, the program focuses on elevating cultural competence, Grant Writing, Difficult Conversations, a state-wide literacy plan, PLCs, and Finding Balance. Attendees choose one of two convenient locations and expect to walk away strategies for navigating their professional and personal lives.



[The 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Pump-Up Primary Conference](#) is the opposite of a small leadership cohort. This internationally attended conference provides Best Practices and Professional Growth to nearly 2200 PreK, Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers from the US and beyond. Attendees walk away feeling inspired and motivated to make a difference in their classrooms! The 2025 Conference is scheduled for March 5-7, 2025

*“I am proud of Illinois ASCD’s role in giving educators a powerful collective voice, providing high-level professional learning and services needed to thrive in their roles, and ultimately contributing to a more effective and innovative education system.”*

### Our Advocacy and Influence Work

Illinois ASCD has a long history of collaboration with educational leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders to promote a balanced education for each child. Most state-level associations similar to Illinois ASCD cannot directly campaign or support candidates as registered non-profits. However, we are allowed to advocate for best practices! Launched in 2007, ASCD’s [Whole Child Initiative](#) is an effort to change the conversation about education from focusing on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes children’s long-term development and success. Illinois ASCD supports this premise. In 2012, Illinois ASCD officers and members met with the Illinois Legislature to promote the national organization initiative on Whole Child Education. The Illinois Legislature declared March to be “Whole Child Month.” Members of Illinois ASCD advocacy task force keep the names of ASCD and Illinois ASCD in Illinois legislators’ minds as the go-to learning organization. Organization members helped to promote the passage of the Whole Child Resolution in Illinois in both houses on March 9, 2012. As the years progress, our members keep in touch with legislators and believe that we have had a say in helping promote educational issues in our state. You can read these for yourself In [Whole Child Senate Resolution SR 0545](#) and [Whole Child House Resolution HR 0781](#), and we are proud to report a reauthorization of the [House Resolution passed again in 2021](#).

[The Whole Child Award](#) recognizes these schools for not only educating the whole child but for successfully creating students who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, engaged in an inclusive learning environment, and prepared to become lifelong learners. This award recognizes those schools that have changed the focus from one of a narrow academic vision to one that promotes the development of the whole child; healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. We invite you to apply for ILASCD’s Whole Child Award. Nominees need to indicate a feasible plan that includes their approaches to a whole child education through collaboration, coordination, and integration of services, as well as strategies to educate the whole child: healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Applications are collected each spring and are scored based on a [grading rubric](#).



### Our Memberships and Partnerships

A solid core membership and partnership network helps build influence, reach, strength, and sustainability while engaging Educators from around the state. These partnerships can provide additional resources and support for schools, enhancing the overall educational experience for participating members. Illinois ASCD focuses on the changing needs of members, assists in developing partnerships for school-based and other organization partnerships, and coordinates area representatives to promote effective communication and collaboration.

There are six classes of [membership](#): professional, honorary, complimentary, student, Group/School, and retired professional. Any person desirous of promoting Illinois ASCD's interest and sharing in its work shall be eligible for membership and may become a professional member by paying the annual dues as provided in the by-laws. A skilled member shall be entitled to vote on agenda items at the annual meeting and to elect officers. Members may also hold office, participate in discussions, and receive such publications as may be provided for the dues paid.

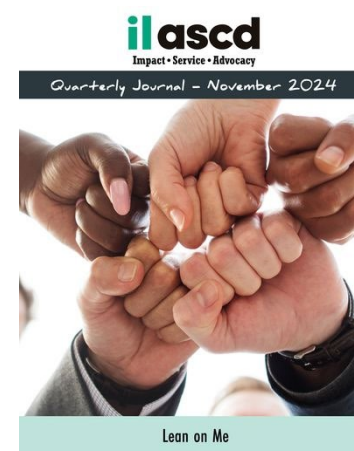
Professional [partnerships](#) among like-minded local organizations are becoming more critical as resources in education become scarce. Pooling resources for a common goal is a mutually beneficial venture. The approach lends itself to increased innovation, leveraging expertise and resources, expanded reach and influences, and the “biggie” as small nonprofits... cost and risk sharing. We hate discussing money in all forms of education, but we all know the reality. The success or failure of specific programs comes down to funding. Finding a trustworthy partner allows for reduced financial burdens. As a leader, my grandiose ideas often come at a significant cost and risk! We can mitigate individual risks and share collective rewards by sharing responsibility.

### Our Publications and Communications

Publications and communications are crucial for all non-profit associations. They are powerful tools for communicating, building credibility, and fostering relationships with various stakeholders. These platforms also allow us to highlight the fantastic work being done by educators around the state. At ILASCD, we have two types of publication products: an in-depth journal and a weekly education brief.

[The Quarterly Journal](#), Illinois ASCD's flagship publication, is intended for everyone interested in Pre-K-12 education issues, including curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership. Each issue contains articles written by educators for educators. We particularly look for articles that inspire improved teaching and help bridge the gap between research and practical application.

[ILASCD Education Briefs](#) are weekly publications designed with the busy Educator in mind. The Illinois ASCD Staff and Board select 5-6 articles from around the US that directly affect Illinois Educators and could have been easily missed. The curated articles focus on the latest insights, research, and best practices in education.



Staying current with education trends is critical for educators, school leaders, and education professionals because the field of education is constantly evolving. I am proud of Illinois ASCD's role in giving educators a powerful collective voice, providing high-level professional learning and services needed to thrive in their roles, and ultimately contributing to a more effective and innovative education system.

### References

Evans, George, "[George Evans Quotes on Education](#)"

InPraxis Group, Inc. (2006). [Effective Professional Development: What the Research Says](#).



*Since graduating from Illinois State University in 2010, Ryan Nevius has served first as assistant executive director, and now as executive director of Illinois ASCD for fourteen years. He is a strong practitioner of collaborative leadership, building capacity at the state level through relationships and opportunities that meet the needs of professional educators doing the work in schools.* [in](#) [X](#) [✉](#)

Legacy is the official journal of The Worthy Educator, elevating the good work being done by leaders in education who are working to change the narrative on the profession and actively plan for impact that transforms its future to serve the needs of a diverse, decentralized, global society that is inclusive, equitable and open to all people as next generations adapt, evolve and contribute by solving problems and creating solutions that meet the needs of a world we have yet to envision.

Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis from educators who are implementing new and innovative approaches in the classroom and at the building and district levels. Information on specifications and instructions to submit can be found online at [theworthyeducator.com/journal](http://theworthyeducator.com/journal).