



Annual Legislative Forum

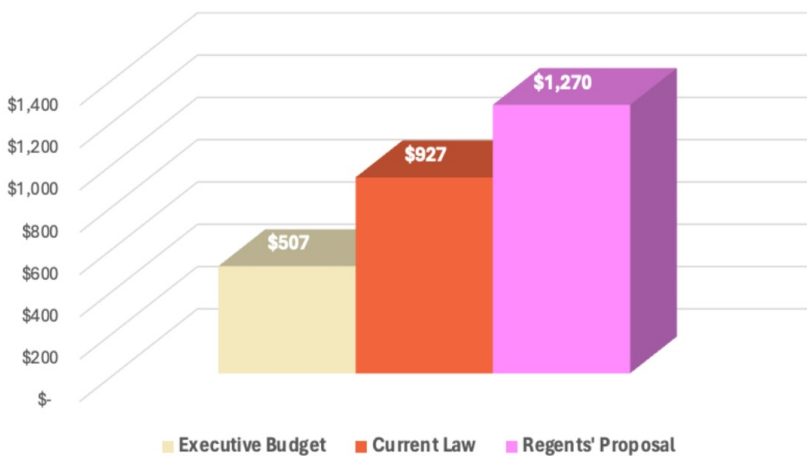
On Public Education

Thursday, February 1

Sponsored by:

Chief School Administrators of Putnam/Northern Westchester,
Chief School Administrators of Southern Westchester
Westchester Putnam School Boards Association

Proposed Increase in 2024-25 Foundation Aid
(\$ millions)



**SCHOOL FUNDING
CONTINUES TO BE AN
UPHILL BATTLE**

**Support public schools
as we continue to
address academics,
social-emotional
health, and safety to
prepare students for
tomorrow's world.**



Funding

School districts are providing more than an academic education in 2024. Students need support in mental health, meal provision, and safety and security.

While we appreciate the full funding of expense-based aids, the Executive Budget proposal for **Foundation Aid** formula falls far short of the needs and expectations of school districts. A return to annual inflationary increases and hold harmless in the formula would result in a minimum expected increase in Foundation Aid of \$55 million for WPSBA districts. The current proposal is **\$21 million short** of that number. In addition to no minimum increase in Foundation Aid, 25 of 46 regional districts will receive fewer dollars than last year as per the proposed budget.

63%
Of WPSBA
districts are
expecting a
REDUCTION in
Foundation Aid



**MAINTAIN FULL
FUNDING OF
FOUNDATION AID**



PRESERVE SAVE-HARMLESS FUNDING

USE UPDATED, RELEVANT DATA

REFORM FORMULA FOR A CHANGING WORLD

The inflation rate for Foundation Aid should be 4.1% per the current law formula. The Executive Budget only permits 2.4%.

Tax Levy Cap Revision

Revise the Tax Levy Cap

Submitted for
WPSBA

Proposal

Limiting growth in local revenue puts a strain on district finances. The property tax cap forces school boards to build budgets that prioritize the tax cap rather than the needs of students. Adjustments are needed to make the calculation more manageable in the long term.

Revisions

Carryover unused levy

Account for enrollment growth

Exempt non-academic expenses

Eliminate negative tax levy caps

Make the tax cap work for students

Review the formula



In 2011, when the **Property Tax Cap** was first enacted, school districts and local governments were promised mandate relief to facilitate the ability to comply with the tax cap. Yet, as school districts face global inflationary challenges, research into the tax cap formula shows that it lacks flexibility and continues to suffer from technical issues, including the mathematical potential for negative cap numbers. At the very least, local communities should be able to determine the level of funding they feel is needed to support educational programs by a simple majority vote.

The Governor should fully fund Foundation Aid with the reinstatement of save-harmless funding and true accounting for the actual rise in inflation. The tax cap formula can be simplified to address incongruities such as negative tax levy caps.

Academic Flexibility

We share the Governor's belief in an evidence-based scientific approach to **reading instruction**. NYSED is best positioned to provide curriculum guidance and learning standards. The proposed "literacy initiative" requires reporting by school districts, which is an added administrative burden and diverts resources that are essential to students and taxpayers. Legislation to mandate curriculum is inflexible and difficult to change, while standards and curriculum continue to evolve.

Let Educators Lead on Literacy



We embrace evidence-based methods of teaching, just not through legislation

SUPPORT SED'S ROLE

Allow curriculum and educational resources to come from educators

The additional **prekindergarten** funding offered to districts over the past two years has sadly not resulted in the expected gain in seats in our region. Districts are unable to provide or contract for a quality program with the current limited amount of per pupil funding through UPK aid. Only 58% of available UPK funding was used by WPSBA districts in the current school year. Streamlining the current preK funding streams and providing inflation-adjusted per pupil funding appropriate to the high-cost suburbs of NYC will assist schools in serving more four-year-old learners.

LOOSEN RESTRICTIONS ON PRE-K AID

Underserved populations

Ensure all children in NYS have access to high-quality, affordable prekindergarten.
Permit districts to prioritize students needing preK, rather than 100% lottery.



Flexibility

Increase flexibility to account for availability of faculty, space, & outside providers.
Amend current law to make pre-K transportation an aidable expense.



Adequate funding

The current per pupil rate for full day Pre-K is insufficient in the suburbs of NYC.
Provide funding that's easily accessed (single stream) & grows with inflation.



ONLY
58%
UPK FUNDING
USED BY WPSBA DISTRICTS

Flexibility is key in encouraging change in academic programs. Curriculum & learning standards need to be guided by SED so they can evolve as needed. Pre-K funding should be released to all districts with local determination of how to provide the service.

Operational Flexibility

FLEXIBLE RESOURCES

Mental Health

In today's world, schools need to meet the growing demand of students and families in need of mental health services.

Long Term

Districts know best how to provide solutions for their own students: There is not a one-size-fits-all approach for any one student or district.

Aid Stream

Well-being is necessary so students are prepared for learning: A dedicated funding stream would ensure SMH resources without compromising programs.

All Students

There is no differentiation here between districts: ALL students need these resources, regardless of socioeconomic or geographic factors.

Safety

Nothing is more important than the physical safety of our students and staff: Allocate funds with broad allowable uses including capital projects, security staff, & safety training.



A flexible dedicated aid stream is needed to empower schools to support the **mental health** needs of students and to remain vigilant about school **safety**. Each district needs to look for effective solutions appropriate to their community and requires ongoing funds available to meet these ever-growing needs. We look to NYS to ensure fairly-compensated community behavioral health professionals are available to serve students and their families.

Calendar flexibility gives districts the ability to support diverse populations without jeopardizing state aid. Student mental health and safety must be addressed based on student and community needs.

School districts are uniquely aware of the communities they serve and wish to incorporate holidays and cultural celebrations beloved by students and their families. Increasing the **calendar flexibility** limited by law would help districts respond to additional holidays and climate-related events while maintaining necessary instructional time. Permitting aidable days beyond the current Sept 1st through Regents Rating Day would better balance the needs of families and schools.

CYBERSECURITY

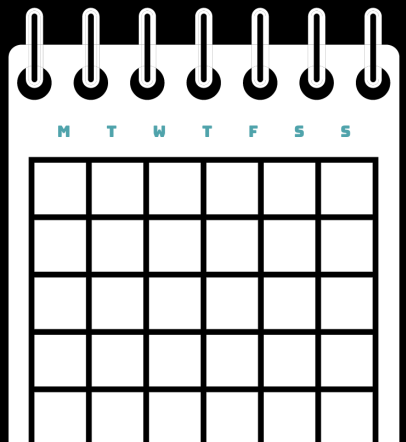
PREVENTING & RESPONDING TO CYBER ATTACKS REQUIRES PLANNING, TRAINING, STAFF, AND FUNDING

The additional funding for state entities tasked with **cybersecurity** proposed in the Executive Budget is critical for school districts. K-12 institutions are frequent targets of these attacks and need the support of experts to avoid and respond to cybersecurity threats.

SCHOOL CALENDARS NEED FLEXIBILITY

Change aidable calendar days to allow earlier starts to the school year

Flexibility would allow districts to provide additional holidays in diverse communities



Longevity

Long term projects to ensure **climate resilience** for schools cannot be left off the to-do list. While we appreciate the additional funding available through the Clean Green Schools program, this is only an option for a fraction of school districts. We support the position of NYSSBA, NYSCOSS and ASBO-NY that additional funding, timing, and coordination is essential for the movement towards increased use of zero emission school buses. Energy performance contracts help to improve the energy efficiency of aging school buildings, but assistance is also needed to ensure climate resiliency of buildings that were not built to withstand the flooding and heat episodes that are already occurring in NYS.

We need to prepare for the future. The added mandate for zero-emission buses last year needs an adjustment to allow for reasonable exemptions, timing, and proper funding. Our school buildings are aging, so funding for long term projects is needed to ensure they can endure today's changing climate. We also need to empower school districts with reserve fund flexibility to practice sound fiscal management.



Zero Emission Buses & Infrastructure

Planning, technical support, & funding are needed for the transition to zero-emission school buses. Infrastructure issues include charging and storing buses, availability of electricity & hookups, remapping bus routes, and training for maintenance.



Aging School Buildings

School facilities need to withstand the demands of a changing climate. Enhanced funding is needed to support capital projects to improve climate resiliency and energy efficiency to provide a comfortable and safe environment for students.



Increased Incidents of Flooding

Climate change is leading to heavier rainfall and extreme flooding. Old school buildings are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to potential closures, which interrupts learning. Funding is needed to equip buildings against this growing issue.



Additional Funding for Air Conditioning

School buildings are ill-equipped for the patterns of extreme heat that are now regular occurrences. Students cannot remain engaged in an uncomfortable learning environment. Rising temperatures, due to climate change, expose students to health risks.

RESERVE FUNDS ALLOW SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO BE MORE FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE

Greater flexibility and additional reserve funds, including reserves for other post-employment benefits (OPEB), will provide more consistency and clarity for students and taxpayers.



School districts have the responsibility to practice sound, **fiscal management**. The state recognizes how important this is for their own purposes and has committed to increase its "rainy-day" fund to 15% of their total budget, compared to the current legal maximum of 4% unappropriated reserves permitted to schools. Districts that wish to prepare for long term eventualities deserve the same opportunity to manage their finances. Greater flexibility will get districts on more solid footing to help spare students and taxpayers from disruptive budget actions if there is an economic downturn. Permitting reserves for long term costs such as other post-employment benefits (OPEB) would help school districts manage finances.

Staffing

Hiring and retaining qualified staff has become increasingly difficult

RECRUITMENT

RETENTION

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



STAFFING BARRIERS

- Encourage NYSED to create more flexibility in certification of teacher candidates.
- Civil service reform is needed to improve the efficiency of hiring.
- Continuing the income cap waiver and making it permanent will help address staffing shortages among teachers, bus drivers, school security personnel, and other school professionals.

It is crucial that student mental health is supported. Funding is needed to ensure qualified school-based mental health professionals can be hired by any district. Clinical mental health services should also be available in schools and communities.

It is imperative that NY work on **fixing civil service** by streamlining the process for employers and potential employees. Updating exam criteria to represent current job skills and expanding the pool of eligible candidates would ensure better hiring practices. Civil service requirements delay the timely hiring of quality candidates and compel schools to terminate competent and dedicated provisional employees.

As many teachers retire and leave the classroom, there must be a focused statewide effort to support **teacher training, recruitment, and retention**. Continuing the waiver of the \$35,000 income cap for retired public employees who return to work in a school district or BOCES is an effective mechanism for addressing staff shortages. We are supportive of NYSED's aim to diversify the teacher workforce. Schools need help in hiring and funding school-based mental health professionals to support our students.

Civil service reforms would decrease administrative costs, increase efficiency, and allow school districts to choose their preferred candidates for civil service positions. NY is expected to need almost 200,000 teachers as we slip into the next decade. We cannot name a better way to grow the workforce than streamlining recruitment and improving retention.

Improve Civil Service

TESTING & HIRING

- Offer civil service tests more frequently
- Standardize grading metrics
- Modernize test questions
- Allow flexibility in part-time job requirements
- Increase efficiency with electronic recruitment
- Expand eligible employees to a rule of 5



Special Services

INCREASE SALARY CAP FOR CTE TEACHERS



**SUPPORT
BOCES**



PROVIDE FLEXIBLE TIMING IN ANNUAL BOCES BUDGET VOTE

BOCES-based career and technical education (CTE) programs help provide students with essential skills for the transition to career or college.

However, a lot has changed in the 30 years since the state instituted the current reimbursement formula. NYS needs to update the current formula and increase the aidable cap on BOCES salaries for CTE instructors. Plus, we urge legislators to allow some flexibility on the date that component districts **vote on the BOCES budget** to ensure all boards can weigh in on BOCES plans.

PROTECT SPECIAL ACT SCHOOL DISTRICTS!

Rate-Setting

Swiftly revise the tuition rate-setting process based on prompt study results.

Annual Rates

Allocate interim plus tuition rate annually on July 1st to allow for budgeting with approved rate.

Security Costs

Account for security costs as direct care or eliminate direct/indirect cost screen.

NYS needs to fully support students, especially when they have a need or interest in programs outside their local district. Updating the aidable cap on BOCES CTE instructor salaries will allow more students to participate. Prompt improvements to the tuition rate-setting process are needed to ensure that SASDs survive to support students with substantial needs. Saddling school districts with a greater share of costs for CSE residential placements can result in reductions in general ed programs in local districts.

Special Act School Districts (SASDs) provide specialized services to some of NYS's most challenged students whose individual needs cannot be met in their home district. To ensure fiscal stability, these public-school districts need the approved tuition rate-setting study to conclude quickly and revise a broken process. While SASDs await permanent improvements in the rate-setting process, we urge legislators and regulators to ensure that an interim plus tuition rate is granted by July 1st of each year, and that interest and investment income accrued through reserves not be considered offsetting revenue in the current rate calculation.

The executive budget seeks to permanently eliminate **the state's responsibility for students who are placed by a Committee on Special Education (CSE) into a residential placement.** The cost-sharing formula, which is codified into NYS law, requires the state to pay 18.4% of the cost for these placements. Shifting the state burden to local school districts can result in cuts to general education to pay a higher portion of programs for identified students. We call on NYS to pay their portion instead of requiring school districts to pay 56.8% of the cost and local governments assuming the remainder.

\$30 MILLION BURDEN ON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

SPECIAL EDUCATION COST SHIFT



Reverse the shift in the state's share of the cost of residential placement of students with disabilities!

NYS should resume paying the 18.4% of CSE placement costs they have passed on to schools.