

Legislative and Budget Priorities, 2023

The 24 school districts of the Capital Region are united in support of the following priorities for the 2023 Legislative session:

Priority 1: Fully fund Foundation Aid and expense-based aids



The phase-in of Foundation Aid must continue in the 2023-24 school year to ensure that all districts receive at least as much as is generated by the formula. This general operating aid will help ensure that districts have funding to support New York's 21st-century schools.

It is equally important that expense-based aids be allowed to flow to districts at current law levels. These aid payments

are calculated as a percentage of expenses already incurred by districts, with the mutual understanding that they would get the aid in the following year.

Both Foundation Aid and expense-based aids are important to districts, as they are predictable and reliable funding sources that can be used to build accurate, balanced budgets. Funding these formula-based aids will fully allow districts to keep pace with the needs of our students.

Priority 2: Streamline funding for universal prekindergarten programs

The goal of prekindergarten is to prepare early learners with a solid foundation for future learning and development throughout their P-12 continuum. To ensure that access is truly equitable to all families who want it, barriers to program development and expansion must continue to be addressed. This includes ensuring that students with the greatest needs can access this important programming.

To do this, the system of prekindergarten funding and oversight in New York needs to be redesigned and streamlined. Different funding streams and program requirements under the umbrella of prekindergarten programming have led to confusion and inequitable funding.

The Executive has announced her intent to propose a new investment of \$125 million for new prekindergarten seats. Rather than making those funds available to new seats and new districts only, these funds should be used to right-size the allocations in underfunded districts and districts currently only able to offer a half-day prekindergarten program.

The imbalance in funding allocations and programmatic constraints have prevented districts from utilizing the monies that have been made available in the last two years. There are a variety of legitimate, practical reasons why this is happening. These include lack of space in school settings; lack of community-based partners; lack of administrative staff and the cost of administrative oversight within the maximum allocations per student; barriers to certification

for community-based programs; and shortages in certified early learning educators. A sharp disparity between state funding for childcare slots and prekindergarten slots also limits the number of prekindergarten slots offered by community-based partners.



To address the inequities and confusion that currently exist, the superintendents in the Capital Region ask that Education law and funding formulas (specifically 3602-e, 7, i and 3602-e, 10) be amended to allow for the following:

- Give enrollment preference in lotteries for prekindergarten programs to students who are economically disadvantaged.
- Ensure that funding for prekindergarten slots is first and foremost based on student need. Some of the state's neediest districts have a per pupil state support ceiling that is the state funding floor for wealthier districts. This inequity should be remediated.
- Reinvest any unused prekindergarten funds into a statewide pool and then increase support for underfunded districts. Available funding could be used to increase per pupil allocations in districts where state funding is not adequate to support current programs.

Priority 3: Support access to community mental health services



Children and families in crisis cannot succeed academically unless they are healthy; physically and mentally. But throughout the Capital Region, students and families struggle to connect to needed mental health services

within their communities. Throughout our region, we estimate 136 students have been hospitalized in psychiatric facilities since September 2022. The number of mental health providers and the number of psychiatric beds available in our region are limited, and so very often students need to go out of state and far away from home to receive treatment. Further, we consistently have several students waiting at

home for a psychiatric bed to become available to them. We estimate that there are at least 20 students currently in this situation throughout our region.

For too many students and families, the repetitive cycle that comes with mental health needs is extremely disruptive to the educational process and ultimately their lives. Community-based mental health programs must be funded adequately and equitably to ensure that students and their families can receive mental health care, including inpatient treatment. As the state considers a much-needed investment in mental health care and treatment options for New Yorkers, these plans must include care for all who need it, including children.

AS DISTRICTS PREPARE FOR ELECTRIC BUS TRANSITION, BARRIERS REMAIN

As the 24 school districts in the Capital Region begin planning for a transition to electric buses, a variety of logistical and financial concerns are coming to light. The cost of an electric school bus has increased by more than 40% in the last two years. The charging technology has changed dramatically during that same timeframe. As a result, districts that have already purchased these buses are finding that the technology has quickly become outdated. Further, it is becoming clear that companies such as National Grid are not yet prepared to support the expansion and strain on the grid that will be required to implement this initiative statewide.

In New York's cold climate, with districts often spanning hundreds of square miles, issues with battery life and vehicle charging are also becoming apparent. This is exacerbated by the ongoing school bus driver shortage which is forcing districts to double and triple bus runs and extend routes.

There are also significant capital construction and infrastructure considerations. Electronic buses are considerably heavier than traditional diesel buses. That means most existing bus lifts in district garages will be made unusable. Many parking lots, roads and bridges do not have adequate weight ratings for the utilization of these heavier vehicles. This will impact not only school districts but the municipalities maintaining the roads and bridges our buses travel.

While school leaders in the Capital Region applaud the state's effort to move toward green technology, we urge state leaders to revisit the original timeline for this transition and work with industry partners to ensure that it is realistic for both them and school districts in all corners of our state.

Capital Region BOCES

- Albany City SD
- Berne-Knox-Westerlo CSD
- Bethlehem CSD
- Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake CSD
- Cobleskill-Richmondville CSD
- Cohoes City SD
- Duanesburg CSD
- Green Island UFSD
- Guilderland CSD
- Menands UFSD
- Middleburgh CSD
- Mohonasen CSD
- Niskayuna CSD
- North Colonie CSD
- Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk CSD
- Schalmont CSD
- Schenectady City SD
- Schoharie CSD
- Scotia-Glenville CSD
- Sharon Springs CSD
- Shenendehowa CSD
- South Colonie CSD
- Voorheesville CSD
- Watervliet City SD



Anita M. Murphy
Capital Region BOCES District Superintendent

Joseph P. Dragone, Ph.D.
Capital Region BOCES Senior Executive Officer