



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

450 Mamaroneck Ave, Harrison, NY 10528 • (914) 345-8737 • www.lhec.org • lhec@lhec.org

LHEC Review of State Budget Priorities

Since 1976, the Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) has been a leading regional public education advocacy voice and resource for the 77 public school districts in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties. Our districts educate over 239,000 students and encompass more than 1.7 million community members. Below please find a review of the state budget process and the Coalition's perspective on our budget priorities.

Student Mental Health:

Executive Budget: Provided for \$100 million over two years for a competitive grant program (RECOVS) that required districts to match funding with federal ARP funds.

Enacted Budget: Provides \$100 million over two years for competitive grant program (RECOVS) that allows districts or BOCES to match funding with any local, state, or federal sources of funds.

LHEC Position: We welcome the focus on student mental health and the dollars provided to assist in hiring mental health professionals or provide additional summer and after-school programming to assist students. We welcome changes to the proposed program that no longer require districts to match with one-time federal funds. We will continue to advocate for an ongoing source of funding for all districts to support student mental health.

Foundation Aid Funding, Formula and Regional Cost Index:

Executive Budget: Provided additional planned funding for year two of three-year phase-in of full Foundation Aid funding.

Enacted Budget: Provides additional planned funding for year two of three-year phase-in of full Foundation Aid funding. Additional reporting on district plans for ARP and substantial additional Foundation Aid funding will be required.

LHEC Position: After so many years of advocating to fully fund Foundation Aid, LHEC and other public education advocates support the continuation of last year's agreement to fully fund the formula within three years. Now that full funding is achieved, we will continue to advocate for the use of updated data and a regional cost index that does not unduly penalize districts in the lower Hudson Valley.

Tax Cap Revisions:

Executive Budget: No changes proposed to the tax cap formula.

Enacted Budget: No changes proposed to the tax cap formula.

LHEC Position: We will continue to advocate for common sense revisions to the tax cap formula.

Zero-emission School Buses:

Executive Budget: Requires all purchases of school buses to be zero-emission by July 1, 2027, and full fleet conversion by 2035. No additional funding provided.

Enacted Budget: Purchase and fleet conversion dates as proposed by the Executive Budget were enacted, with the availability of two-year waivers on a district-by-district basis to delay the process until 2029 and 2037. A minimum of \$500 million of a proposed environmental bond will be designated as funding for zero-emission school buses if the voters approve the Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Bond Act in November 2022. NYSERDA has been directed to provide technical assistance with federal funding applications. Districts must create a workforce development report to plan for employee impact of transition to zero-emission buses.

LHEC Position: After the zero-emission bus proposal arose in the Executive Budget, LHEC advocated for a dedicated funding source, a team from SED/NYSERDA to assist districts, the inclusion of districts in NYSERDA programs such as the Truck Voucher Incentive Program and charging infrastructure to be included in the Clean School Initiative and ensuring that workforce development and retraining would be available to current district mechanics. We feel that many of our issues were considered in the final plan but will continue to monitor the proposed program to ensure that operational feasibility for school districts is paramount in the conversion process.



Funding for Pre-K Programs:

Executive Budget: Provided no additional funding for prekindergarten.

Enacted Budget: Provides \$100 million in additional funding for new PreK slots.

LHEC Position: We are supportive of additional funding for prekindergarten programs, but disappointed that the majority of additional PreK slots continue to be funded at inadequate levels with no cost inflation factor added for existing PreK programs. For many of our districts, the new PreK funding looks like an addition in school aid runs, but it remains to be seen how many districts will be able to add spaces or develop new PreK programs with the per pupil funding rate set at a level inadequate to provide a quality program in the suburbs of NYC.

Special Act Public School Districts (SASD):

Executive Budget: Provided an 11% increase in tuition rates for the coming school year. Proposed permanent shift of the state share of the cost of residential CSE placements to school districts.

Enacted Budget: Provides an 11% increase in tuition rates for the coming school year. Shift in state share of the cost of residential CSE placements to school districts is continued for the third year.

LHEC Position: After many years of advocating for increased funding and measures to ensure fiscal stability for Special Act School Districts, we are appreciative of the tuition rate increase to assist SASDs in meeting the needs of their vulnerable student populations. We will continue to advocate for longer term measures to ensure tuition parity on an ongoing basis and improve the rate setting policy. We are pleased that the state share of residential CSE placements was not permanently moved to school districts but will continue to advocate to have the state once again pay their 18.24% share needed to ensure proper placement of the students affected.

Administrative Relief:

Executive Budget: Provided for electronic submission of transportation aid paperwork and for SED to evaluate forgiveness for paperwork errors involved in building and transportation aid applications. No funding provided for the prior year aid claims queue. No changes proposed to Open Meetings Law.

Enacted Budget: Allows for the electronic submission and SED forgiveness in the aid process as proposed in the Executive Budget. No funding provided for the prior year aid claims queue. After a two-month extension of the current emergency allowance for virtual meetings, Open Meetings Law will be amended to permit virtual participation of board members at meetings with a significant reason to do so. The noticing of board member locations will no longer be necessary if the board adopts a resolution to support that. There is a requirement that a quorum of the board must be meeting in person, and all members must be clearly seen, heard and identifiable during the meeting. In a “hybrid” meeting, public comment must be allowed virtually in real time.

LHEC Position: Blanket forgiveness for paperwork errors on aid applications has been on the LHEC advocacy agenda for the past few years, however, we are disappointed that the forgiveness was not coupled with additional funding to work on clearing the aid claims queue that already amounts to over \$300 million. We are very supportive of plans to ensure board member virtual participation at meetings without requiring individuals to announce and open their physical locations to the public. The need for a quorum in person and allowing for the public to participate both in person and virtually may limit the number of boards who choose to operate in this manner. As the new allowances are set to expire in June of 2024, we plan to monitor the effectiveness of the changes to Open Meetings Law and continue to advocate for common sense adjustments.