



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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LHEC Review of State Budget Priorities

Student Mental Health:

Executive Budget: Insurers will be required to cover services provided at school-based mental health clinics. Apart from the budget process, the Governor commenced a listening tour focused on youth mental health, culminating in a Youth Mental Health & Wellness Summit.

Enacted Budget: Insurers will be required to cover services provided at school-based mental health clinics.

LHEC Position: We welcome the additional coverage for school-based mental health services. We are hopeful that the Governor's listening tour and subsequent summit will involve public school educators to ensure that schools are represented in any potential policy initiatives coming from the tour and summit. LHEC has long advocated for a Blue Ribbon Commission focused on youth and family mental health that would involve stakeholders from public education, relevant government departments and community-based providers of mental health services. We note that additional broad-based aid focused on student mental health services in schools was not forthcoming, although SED was encouraged to move more quickly in distributing RECOVS grant monies from last year's state budget.

School Safety:

Executive Budget: Continuation of a one-year pension waiver that will allow retired police officers to receive pay for work in school security without endangering their public pensions.

Enacted Budget: Continuation of a one-year pension waiver that will allow retired police officers to receive pay for work in school security without endangering their public pensions.

LHEC Position: We support the continuing pension waiver to aid in hiring for school security, but also for retired teachers to continue in the workforce. LHEC will continue to advocate for a permanent increase in allowable salary limits for retired police officers, providing additional flexible resources for school safety and recommending new models for school security.

Pre-Kindergarten Growth and Success:

Executive Budget: Additional funds provided through the UPK aid stream - \$100 million for new PreK slots directed at districts throughout the state, plus an additional \$25 million in directed grants for PreK expansion. Additional reporting requirements on PreK provision and usage are proposed.

Enacted Budget: Additional funds provided through the UPK aid stream - \$100 million for new PreK slots directed at districts throughout the state and \$50 million for statewide Universal Full-Day PreK grants. Additional reporting requirements on PreK provision, usage, and barriers to utilizing UPK aid are required beginning in the 2023-24 school year.

LHEC Position: The LHEC continues to support consolidation of PreK grant programs, aid comparable to the NYC per pupil rate and increased flexibility in the use of PreK aid funding to allow school districts to consider creative solutions to support families with early childhood education.

Foundation Aid Funding, Formula and Regional Cost Index:

Executive Budget: According to the schedule laid out two years ago, the coming school year included the final phase-in amount to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula. A 3% increase in Foundation Aid funding was budgeted for fully funded school districts. \$250 million was expressly set aside for spending on high-impact tutoring.

Enacted Budget: According to the schedule laid out two years ago, the coming school year includes the final phase-in amount to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula. A 3% increase in Foundation Aid funding was budgeted for fully funded school districts. The proposed tutoring set aside was not included.

LHEC Position: After so many years of advocating to fully fund Foundation Aid, LHEC and other public education advocates support and celebrate the full funding of the Foundation Aid formula. LHEC is pleased to see that the Senate and Assembly agreed with our position that Foundation Aid dollars are general operating funds, and the state should not be determining how



school districts use those funds. We were disappointed that neither the executive nor enacted budget included funding for an SED study on updating the 2007 formula. However, now that full funding is achieved, we will continue to advocate for an updated formula and data (including a more appropriate regional cost index), along with a process to regularly re-evaluate the formula given the current needs of schools and students.

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.

Climate Resiliency:

Executive Budget: New reporting requirement for 2023-24 school year for school districts to provide information on requirements for implementation of zero emission school bus mandate.

Enacted Budget: New reporting requirement delayed until 2024-25 school year for school districts to provide information on requirements for implementation of zero emission school bus mandate.

LHEC Position: We are supportive of new reporting requirements being delayed until additional information is available from NYSERDA. LHEC will continue to advocate for additional planning and implementation support for the zero emission school bus mandate as well as additional assistance in improving the climate resiliency of school buildings.

Special Act Public School Districts (SASD):

Executive Budget: Provided \$2.5 million for a tuition rate-setting study proposed by SED, with the requirement that the study results be cost-neutral to the state and local school districts.

Enacted Budget: Provides funding for tuition rate-setting study and rejects the cost-neutral requirement.

LHEC Position: We are very appreciative that the state plans to study revising a broken tuition rate-setting process. We look forward to having our regional SASDs involved in the study process and continuing to bring to the forefront issues that will help ensure the fiscal stability of SASDs.

Mandate Relief and Transparency:

Executive Budget: Proposed re-instituting school building level reporting requirements for an additional 5-year period.

Enacted Budget: Rejects school building level financial reporting.

LHEC Position: We are pleased to see that the legislature recognizes the duplicative nature of the school-based financial reporting system and has removed one unnecessary mandate from school districts. LHEC will continue to advocate for a more comprehensive look at unfunded mandates on school districts.

Employee Retention and Recruitment:

Executive Budget: Proposed increasing availability of continuous recruitment and modernizing the exam process for civil service positions. Income cap waiver extended for an additional year.

Enacted Budget: Authorized increasing availability of continuous recruitment and modernizing the exam process for civil service positions. Income cap waiver extended for an additional year.

LHEC Position: We are pleased that the income cap waiver has been extended for an additional year, although (as noted in the school safety section), we will continue to advocate for a higher income level going forward to ensure that districts can hire retirees without affecting public sector pensions. Improvements to civil service hiring procedures such as modernizing the exam process are welcome and we will continue to advocate for other logical improvements to civil service procedures.