



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Room S-221,
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC), which is a joint project of the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents, Dutchess County School Boards Association, Rockland County School Boards Association and Westchester Putnam School Boards Association, we wish to convey our most sincere appreciation for the significant resources included in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which will have an incredibly positive impact on public school students in New York and across the country.

Our membership represents 239,000 students across four counties in New York. We write to request additional flexibility in the use of the American Rescue Plan funding to ensure the maximum return on federal investment for our students, parents, educators and communities. Specifically, we urge you to include language in the forthcoming FY22 appropriations package that will enable districts to use ARP funds solely for the purpose of capital construction through December 2026.

Currently, the deadline to obligate ARP funds is September 2024, however there is a great deal of concern among our districts and those throughout New York State about their ability to meet this deadline specifically for capital construction projects. The length of the review process is cause for a review of timeline. Several districts have reported that they have yet to have their application approved by the State Education Department, which is required to review and approve capital projects. Additionally, given the current supply chain challenges it is reasonable to anticipate that capital projects will require significantly longer lead times.

Given that neither the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act or the House-passed Build Back Better Act include standalone funding for rebuilding America's schools, it is imperative that districts have more time to ensure that American Rescue Plan funding can cover costs associated with the redesign, construction, renovation and retrofitting and replacements of public-school buildings. More flexibility to spend money on school construction has no budgetary impact on the federal government, but it does enable districts to invest ARP funding in more effective ways. For New York public schools to maintain global competitiveness and provide more equitable opportunities for early learning as outlined in programs included in the Build Back Better Act, it is essential that we make significant investments in our school facilities using the ARP funding that will enable districts to build more pre-K classrooms, 21st century STEM labs, spaces for new CTE programs as well as ensure each and every student is accessing a safe, healthy learning environment.

LHEC is not the only local entity requesting an additional two years to obligate this unprecedented funding to ensure that ARP dollars are spent in a manner that best addresses district needs. Our proposed spending deadline aligns with the deadline for local governments, who are also seeking more time for capital projects due to supply chain issues, worker shortages and other economic factors that drive up the cost and time needed for capital projects.

Your support for this extension would be greatly appreciated, both by LHEC and the students, parents, teachers and administrators they represent. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and for continuing to be a partner as we navigate these new and difficult times.

Sincerely,

The Lower Hudson Education Coalition