



## LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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# 2022-23 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.

**Student Mental Health & School Safety:** *Funding to provide for school safety and the mental health of students continues to be a critical need for schools.*

LHEC recommends the following:

- Amend the proposed RECOVS grant program to ensure that all students have equitable access to mental health supports, by eliminating the “needs-designation” and by providing funding as a **per pupil allocation**.
- Include the Assembly’s proposed **11% cost of living adjustment** to support the expansion of community based behavioral health services.
- Ensure additional **flexible funding categories and resources for school safety** for areas such as staffing, security upgrades, professional development and training.
- Support the Senate and Assembly’s proposal to provide **additional mental health grants**.
- Include the Senate’s proposal to **expand community school grants** and the distribution of their funding.

**Foundation Aid Formula and Regional Cost Index:** *The State’s commitment to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula, together with updated data inputs and adjustments to the current formula would ensure adequate and representative state aid to local school districts. Additionally, the regional cost index for the Lower Hudson Valley should be adjusted to reflect the cost of operating in the high-cost NYC suburbs.*

LHEC recommends the following:

- Include the Senate’s proposal to invest \$195 million into **updating the school aid formula data**.
- Include the Senate’s proposal to include \$1.2 million in State Operations funding for a **Foundation Aid Study**.
- Amend the **Regional Cost Index of the Lower Hudson Valley** to reflect the high cost of operating in the suburbs of NYC by establishing a new “MTA Region” to include the LHEC counties with NYC/Long Island.
- Include \$20 million for **Tax Certiorari Grants** and grants for districts with an extraordinary change in taxable property valuation.
- Include the Senate’s proposal to increase the **aidable salaries for staff providing career and technical education services** through BOCES on a phased-in basis that includes an amount not to exceed \$40,000 for 2022-23 school year; \$50,000 for the 2023-24 school year; and \$60,000 for the 2024-25 school year and thereafter.

**Special Act Public School Districts (SASD):** *SASDs are public school districts that provide specialized services to some of NYS’s most challenged students whose individual needs cannot be met in their home district. Measures are needed to ensure the fiscal and programmatic stability of Special Act public school districts.*

- Include the Senate’s proposal that would **pause the annual reconciliation process** for special education schools for five years and require the State Education Department to assemble a **task force to replace the current rate setting methodology** structure.
- Include the Senate proposal to **hold harmless** 4410s, 853s and Special Act schools from **enrollment fluctuation** of students due to COVID for the 2021-22 school year.
- Include the promised **11% increase in tuition rates** and ensure that increases are received early in the school year.

**High Cost of Special Education Services:** *Modifications to the special education process would reduce the burden on districts while maintaining quality and needed services for special needs students.*

- Accept the Senate and Assembly proposals to **restore the 18.42% State share** of CSE residential placement costs.
- Include the Senate’s proposal to allow **4201 schools to establish fiscal reserve funds**.

**Zero-emission School Buses:** *The Executive Budget proposes that all new school buses will be zero-emissions by 2027 and school bus fleets will be fully electric by 2035. Due to the significantly higher cost of electric buses and the operational difficulties of transforming school bus fleets in the coming years, school districts will be looking to the state for assistance with managing the transition to more environmentally friendly school buses throughout NYS.*

LHEC recommends the following:

- Accept and increase the Senate's proposal of \$1 billion in **new funding for the purchase of or conversion** to zero emission school and transit buses and the installation of bus and passenger car charging infrastructure.
- Accept the Assembly's proposal that would require **SED and NYSEERDA to determine** by July 1, 2025 whether school districts will be able to comply with the requirements without incurring financial hardship or disrupting the transportation of students subject to factors of anticipated costs, availability of zero-emission school buses, and operational capacity, etc. If SED and NYSEERDA do not find that school districts will be able to comply with these requirements, they must delay the implementation of the mandate.
- Accept the Senate's proposal to **extend the timeline** to no later than July 1, 2029 for the purchase of new school buses to be zero emission.
- Include the Assembly's proposal to include worker protections for transportation service workers and transfer of maintenance work to existing employees; i.e., **training**.
- **Reject** the Assembly and Senate's respective proposals that would require school districts / BOCES to prepare a **workforce development report** related to jobs lost after the purchase / lease of zero-emission buses, to identify gaps in infrastructure operational need, include a comprehensive plan to transition or retrain employees that are impacted, and a cost estimate.
- **Reject** the Assembly and Senate's proposals that would deem any work related to infrastructure build out as public work and therefore **require prevailing wage**.
- Include the Assembly's proposal that would include zero-emission school bus electric **charging stations within transportation aid** as an approved cost and include the Senate's proposal that would **allow electricity within transportation aid** approved costs.
- Include the Senate's proposal that would require **NYSEERDA to provide technical assistance** to school districts.
- Direct NYSEERDA to include **school districts as eligible** applicants in the Truck Voucher Incentive Program.
- Authorize school districts to establish a **new reserve fund** to set aside monies to comply with the transition.
- **Protect districts from potential price gouging** by transportation companies.

**Funding for Pre-K Programs:** *Ensuring all preschool-age children have access to a high-quality pre-K program that their family can afford is a worthy goal. State funding is critical in public school districts which have identified a clear need in their community.*

LHEC recommends the following:

- Include the Senate's proposal to **increase funding for universal pre-k to at least \$250 million** with a full phase-in over two years.
- Consolidate pre-K grant programs into an ongoing funding stream that can be deployed for 3-year-old programs, as well as 4-year-old programs, and amend the current law to include a **cost inflation factor** in per pupil allocations.

**Administrative Relief:** *Over the past months, school boards have developed the technology infrastructure to handle virtual meetings and have frequently had greater public attendance at virtual board meetings. Although we expect in person meetings to remain the norm, the ability of boards to meet partially or fully virtual provides needed flexibility for local communities.*

- Make **permanent changes to Open Meetings Law** to allow for continuation of virtual meetings and participation of Board of Education trustees remotely, without requiring public notice of trustee locations.

**Tax Cap Revisions:** *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. However, in the years since, meaningful mandate relief has failed to materialize for school districts. It is essential that the Executive and the Legislature consider adjustments to the formula to reduce unintended consequences of formulaic calculations.*

- Allow districts to **apply the unused allowable tax levy** within a subsequent three-year period to balance the needs of schools and property taxpayers.

**Mandate Relief and Transparency:** *A thorough review of existing mandates and increased transparency prior to the enactment of new mandates would assist school districts in managing the significant cost burdens of compliance.*

- Require a **complete fiscal note**, prepared by a New York State actuary, to accompany each education-related bill, prior to the passage of legislation.
- Establish an '**Education Mandate Relief Redesign Team**'. Similar to efforts undertaken by the State in 2011, this redesign team should be tasked with reviewing ways to reduce the costs of unfunded mandates by determining how school districts may be given greater ability to control costs.