LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION
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2026 NYS Advocacy Agenda

As New York prepares the SFY 2026–27 Executive Budget, the Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) urges the State to prioritize equitable funding, invest in student well-being, and ensure districts have the flexibility to meet evolving challenges. Representing 96 school districts serving more than 285,000 students across Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties, LHEC's recommendations reflect the shared priorities of the Lower Hudson Valley's educational community.

Funding our Public Schools

New York must modernize its school funding structure to ensure adequacy, equity, and predictability. Building on the Foundation Aid reforms, the 2026–27 Budget should provide stability while addressing growing cost pressures and evolving student needs.

Recommendations:

- Modify ELFA to direct SED to complete **district-specific modeling** of the Rockefeller Institute's recommendations and establish a permanent **Foundation Aid Review Commission** to regularly re-evaluate cost drivers, student needs, and regional factors to make recommendations to the Executive and the Legislature.
- Maintain the **"save harmless"** policy and protect **expense-based aids** to avoid fiscal disruption.
- Modernize the **Property Tax Cap** to reflect the real costs of educating students, to provide flexibility for expenditures that are out of the districts' hands, to address enrollment growth, and mandate-related and increasing fixed costs, and to allow unutilized levy to be deferred to the next year.
- Increase flexibility in **use of reserves** to plan for long-term expenses, such as other post-employment benefits.
- Ensure public school support remains strong by declining to participate in the OBBBA **voucher program**.
- Address the unique needs of **Special Act School Districts and BOCES** by ensuring prompt receipt of interim tuition rates, equitable tuition rate-setting, reserve authority, and appropriate salary caps.
- Ensure current data is used for **UPK projections** so districts have resources to continue current year UPK programs.

Investing in Students and Staff

Student success depends on healthy, safe learning environments and a strong workforce. State investments must support school-based behavioral health, ensure campus safety, and remove barriers to hiring and retaining qualified educators and staff.

Recommendations:

- Create an expense-driven aid stream for school-based **mental health services** and partnerships with community providers.
- Provide flexible funding for **school safety**, including staffing, infrastructure, and cybersecurity.
- Reform **civil service and teacher certification** systems to streamline hiring and strengthen the educator pipeline.
- Reinstate a statewide **Mandate Relief Redesign Team** and ensure transparency through fiscal impact statements for all new mandates. All new mandates should be fully funded.
- Support **compensation and professional development** strategies that address shortages in specialized and support staff.
- Invest in the school **leadership and teacher pipeline** through mechanisms such as student loan forgiveness.

Preparing for the Future

Districts must prepare for long-term challenges related to climate, technology, and community needs. State policy should promote sustainability, early childhood access, and operational flexibility that supports innovation.

Recommendations:

- Fund capital improvements to enhance **climate resiliency**, energy efficiency, and indoor environmental quality.
- Fully fund all costs associated with the **EV bus transition**, including charging infrastructure, hybrid options, and service contracts. **Support A9187** to defer implementation of the EV bus requirement.
- Consolidate **pre-K funding** streams, support increased per pupil rates in areas adjacent to NYC, and include inflation factors in per-pupil rates to promote equitable access.
- Allow **flexibility** in school calendars, transportation rules, and cell phone policy implementation to reflect local needs.
- Support modifications to **school election procedures** to improve efficiency and early availability of voter information.