



LOWER
HUDSON
EDUCATION
COALITION

The LHEC is a joint project of School Superintendents and Board of Education Trustees in the four counties of the Lower Hudson Valley. We work together to share information and advocate on behalf of the public schools we represent.

Dutchess • Putnam • Rockland • Westchester



2020 ADVOCACY AGENDA

* Adequate, Equitable & Predictable School Funding *

* Local Flexibility *

LHEC Sponsoring Organizations:
Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents
Dutchess County School Boards Association
Rockland County School Boards Association
Westchester Putnam School Boards Association



77
Districts



239,000
Students



1.7 Million
Community
Members

LHEC ADVOCACY AGENDA 2020

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 include more than 1.7 million community members.

SCHOOL FUNDING NEEDS TO BE ADEQUATE, EQUITABLE & PREDICTABLE

Foundation Aid: *Provide school districts with adequate and representative state aid through a formula calculated using current school district factors, and ensures that increasing student needs, changes in enrollment, recent poverty data, appropriate regional costs and special education needs are reflected.*

- ◊ Due to the formula being “frozen” since 2008, 34% of the districts in our four-county region receive less than 60% of Foundation Aid, compared to fewer than 10% of districts statewide.
- ◊ Outdated data used in the 2007 Foundation Aid formula does not reflect changes in student demographics and shifting enrollment in the Hudson Valley.
- ◊ “Circuit breakers” that exist in the current formula, such as the floor in the Combined Wealth Index, limit the range of funding available to highest need districts and should be reviewed.

Regional Cost Index: *NYSED should use the most recent Regional Cost Index (RCI) data, and apply it to all State Aid formulas. Additionally, the Lower Hudson Valley should be included with the NYC/Long Island region due to similarities for purposes of the Regional Cost Index.*

- ◊ Currently, NYSED is still using the 2006 RCI, rather than the most recent 2012 RCI, which would better reflect the increasing costs of living in our region.
- ◊ The current regional grouping used for the RCI places the LHEC districts with counties that have a lower cost of living. Our districts face significantly higher costs for staffing and district operations, as well as a higher cost of living for the families in our communities.
- ◊ Grouping LHEC counties with NYC/Long Island will accurately reflect the true regional cost.

Obstacles to Funding Public Education: *Make modifications to the tax cap formula and provide school districts with additional tools to fund public education and offset costs.*

- ◊ The tax levy cap should start with a growth factor of at least 2%, rather than the current linkage to an annual CPI, with no negative tax levies. The cap formula should also be adjusted to account for enrollment growth, and the effects of PILOTs, reserves and transfer to capital.
- ◊ The limit of the SALT deduction has had a disproportionate impact on high property tax areas such as the Lower Hudson Valley region. This reduction of net income for taxpayers presents additional challenges for school districts when raising funds outside of state aid.
- ◊ Additional tools to fund public education could include limiting the impact of large tax certiorari; having the state smooth out the budgetary impacts of changes in pension or healthcare costs; or providing relief from severe transportation mandates.
- ◊ When the tax levy cap was enacted, mandate relief was promised to school districts, but has failed to materialize. The Legislature should require that each education-related bill include a cost estimate to local school districts, prior to voting on the legislation.

Funding of Special Education Services: *Advocate for the promised 40% of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding by the federal government. Modify the formal NYS due process to reduce the burden on districts while maintaining needed services for special education students.*

- ◊ The federal government’s contribution to IDEA is currently 16% of the average cost per pupil nationally and less in high cost states and regions, such as the Lower Hudson Valley. The support of state legislators would amplify our voice in Washington.
- ◊ Shift the burden of proof on Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) back to parents as it is in most other states, and was in New York prior to 2007.
- ◊ Establish limitations on school district funding of parental legal fees.

Compliance Mechanisms: *Provide relief from the financial penalties school districts face as they work to comply with the ever-increasing requirements from NYS.*

- ◊ NYSED should have clear notice requirements to Superintendents on compliance issues.
- ◊ Develop corrective action plans with districts to reduce the use of financial penalties.
- ◊ Support legislation that provides forgiveness on building aid and transportation aid paperwork.
- ◊ Withdraw the proposed regulations regarding substantial equivalency determinations that place a costly burden on public schools.

Special Act Public School Districts (SASD): *Enact S.5606 (Mayer)/A.8001 (Benedetto), giving fiscal and programmatic stability for Special Act public schools, which provide specialized services to some of NYS's most challenged students whose individual needs cannot be met in their home districts.*

- ◊ The SASD tuition rate, set by NYSED's rate setting unit, should be awarded before the beginning of the school year and include growth rates that fund all public school mandates and allow districts to grow their educational programs.
- ◊ Establish an interim plus rate to allow for fluctuations in the student population and the resulting needed staffing changes, as well as unexpected increases in TRS, ERS, and healthcare costs.
- ◊ Permit SASDs to establish a 4% unappropriated reserve fund, like all other public school districts.
- ◊ Consider additional funding for security as young offenders are placed by the courts in Special Act schools subsequent to Raise the Age legislation.

LOCAL FLEXIBILITY BENEFITS OUR COMMUNITIES

Mental Health & Student Safety: *Create new flexible funding for public school districts to provide appropriate services, programs, and facilities to address increased mental health and school safety needs.*

- ◊ School safety measures that require additional funding include staffing, security upgrades, professional development and training.
- ◊ Increasing social-emotional and mental health needs of students require additional resources.
- ◊ Recognize that recess is critical to students' health by adding it to the school day/year calculations.
- ◊ State legislators need to advocate against federal changes to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility and public charge rules that impact students.
- ◊ Allow districts to continue to set their own policies regarding excused and unexcused absences.

Funding Flexibility 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 need in their community.*

- ◊ Pre-K grant programs should be consolidated into an ongoing funding stream, with cost inflation factors built in, that can be deployed for 3-year-old programs, as well as 4-year-old programs.
- ◊ School districts should determine the local need for public pre-K based on the availability of private programs and the physical space and faculty limitations of the district.

Limiting Schools as Polling Places: *Allow schools that are designated as polling locations the same "right of refusal" as other public buildings.*

- ◊ The use of school buildings for elections risks disrupting school safety protocols and interfering with students' programs and activities (i.e., gym, cafeteria or library use).
- ◊ Elections are not undertaken with school calendars in mind, such as the scheduling of primary elections in June 2020 during Regents Exam week.

Time Off for Voting: *Pass S.5314 (Mayer)/A.7837 (Benedetto) to align the new provisions for time off for voting with the operations of school districts.*

- ◊ The new requirement to permit faculty and staff three hours during the school day to vote creates a hardship for districts and is unnecessary given the recent enactment of early voting.

***Thank you to the NYS Senators and Assemblymembers who represent
the public school districts of the Lower Hudson Education Coalition:***

NEW YORK STATE SENATE

Andrea Stewart-Cousins (Senate Majority Leader)

Shelley Mayer (Senate Education Chair)

Jamaal Bailey

Peter Harckham

Alessandra Biaggi

Susan Serino

David Carlucci

James Skoufis

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

Thomas Abinanti

Kieran Lalor

Didi Barrett

Steven Otis

Karl Brabenec

Amy Paulin

David Buchwald

Gary Pretlow

Kevin Byrne

Nader Sayegh

Kevin Cahill

Colin Schmitt

Sandy Galef

Kenneth Zebrowski

Jonathan Jacobson

Ellen Jaffee



For more information visit:
www.lhec.org

Follow us on twitter:
[@lhecNY](https://twitter.com/lhecNY)

2020 LHEC SUBSCRIBERS

Ardsley UFSD
Arlington CSD
Beacon City SD
Bedford CSD
Blind Brook UFSD
Brewster CSD
Briarcliff Manor UFSD
Bronxville UFSD
Byram Hills CSD
Carmel CSD
Chappaqua CSD
Clarkstown CSD
Croton-Harmon UFSD
Dobbs Ferry UFSD
Dutchess BOCES
Eastchester UFSD
East Ramapo CSD
Edgemont UFSD
Elmsford UFSD
Garrison UFSD
Greenburgh CSD
Greenburgh 11 UFSD
Greenburgh-Graham UFSD
Greenburgh-North Castle UFSD

Haldane CSD
Harrison CSD
Hastings-on-Hudson UFSD
Hawthorne Cedar Knolls UFSD
Hendrick Hudson CSD
Hyde Park CSD
Irvington UFSD
Katonah-Lewisboro UFSD
Lakeland CSD
Mahopac CSD
Mamaroneck UFSD
Millbrook CSD
Mt Pleasant CSD
Mt Pleasant-Blythedale UFSD
Mt Pleasant-Cottage UFSD
Mt Vernon City SD
Nanuet UFSD
New Rochelle City SD
North Rockland CSD
North Salem CSD
Nyack UFSD
Ossining UFSD
Pawling CSD
Pearl River UFSD

Peekskill City SD
Pelham UFSD
Pleasantville UFSD
Pocantico Hills CSD
Port Chester-Rye UFSD
Putnam/NW BOCES
Putnam Valley CSD
Rhinebeck CSD
Rockland BOCES
Rye City SD
Rye Neck UFSD
Scarsdale UFSD
Spackenkill UFSD
Somers CSD
South Orangetown CSD
Suffern CSD
SW BOCES
Tarrytowns UFSD
Tuckahoe UFSD
Valhalla UFSD
Wappingers CSD
White Plains City SD
Yonkers City SD
Yorktown CSD