



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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Assembly Education Committee Public Hearing on Learning Loss & Education Challenges December 2022

Thank you to Chair Michael Benedetto and the Assembly Education Committee for permitting the Lower Hudson Education Coalition to submit testimony related to the issue of “learning loss”.

The Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) is a regional public education advocacy resource for 74 public school districts in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties. As a joint project of the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents, the Dutchess County School Boards Association, the Rockland County School Boards Association and the Westchester Putnam School Boards Association, we represent the voices of 225 thousand students, 74 school superintendents and over 475 Board of Education trustees in the four counties of the lower Hudson Valley.

Additional Academic Supports

School districts routinely provide tiered academic supports to students, however, there is no question that public schools have increased the support opportunities for students since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a brief survey of LHEC member superintendents, 100% indicated that their school district has added additional academic supports outside of the school day, and 96% of districts have added additional academic supports within the traditional school day.

Some examples of additional academic supports within the school day provided by LHEC districts include:

- 86% have provided increased support from the classroom teacher
- 73% have expanded or added an academic support/tutoring center
- 36% have expanded or added a peer tutoring program

As all of the respondents indicated additional support was offered outside the traditional school day, the most popular option was making summer programs available to more students (91%); adding after school academic programs (78%) and making small group or individual tutoring available to more students, either on an in-person basis (48% of districts) or online (9%).

In addition to information about what programmatic offerings were being added to traditional academic supports, superintendents indicated that while most of these programs typically target students with an identified academic need (78% of districts have one or more new targeted support program), there has been a significant increase in new academic support programs made available to the entire student body (60% of districts). This demonstrates the necessity for on-going student academic support that is both targeted, and available to all students, many LHEC districts are ensuring that students have access to academic supports even without an identified need to make up academic ground.

Measuring Academic Progress

State tests are typically not a useful measure of student progress in assisting teachers to identify students in need of academic supports. Especially during the pandemic, when state tests were cancelled and then only given to a subset of the student body in the most recent year, they do not even provide a useful snapshot in time of student performance. Instead, districts are more effectively monitoring and assessing student progress with various growth measures that allow teachers to have real-time feedback on the performance of their students over time.



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Most districts are using current measures, or adding new progress measures, to monitor not only overall student progress, but the effectiveness of the academic support systems that have been put in place. 74% of superintendents who responded to the LHEC survey indicated they have plans to measure student progress specifically based on the incremental academic support programs. Many superintendents indicated the use of various benchmark measures to track progress, including academic progress measures (e.g., iReady, MTSS, district-developed benchmark assessments) and also connecting student participation in academic supports to attendance, behavioral and discipline measures.

Funding Additional Supports

Many school districts have received additional funding through the movement toward full funding of the Foundation Aid formula and the federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA). Those funds have been critical to adding or expanding academic supports in our region. Only 9% of superintendents indicated they were able to fund new programs solely out of the general fund budget. An additional 17% were able to fund these programs only out of ARPA funds, which is a temporary source of funding for school districts. The vast majority of our districts (74%) managed to fund programs through a combination of ARPA dollars, additional Foundation Aid and general fund revenues. As the projected “funding cliff” for school districts largely applies to the ARPA funds, the reliance on that funding source is concerning if students continue to need additional academic support beyond 2024. We encourage you and members of the committee to help address this challenge in the upcoming fiscal year

Mental Health Supports

Although the focus of this Assembly hearing is primarily on the need for academic support, we would be remiss if we did not mention the increased funding and supports that school districts are providing for their students in the areas of mental health and social-emotional learning. The two are related and kids facing mental health challenges cannot learn effectively and vice versa.

For this measure, we return to the recent New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) survey which indicates that in the recent pandemic years (2021 and 2022) 80% or more of school superintendents expect to see a positive impact due to their budget in student services in “student mental health, counseling, social work or similar support services” and a similar result (78-79%) for a positive impact on providing “extra academic help for students who need it”. Of course, we are conscious of the expected “fiscal cliff” deadline on the use of ARPA funding and are concerned that student needs – especially in the area of mental health – will continue to be very high, without the help of additional funding. To ensure the ongoing help that our students need, LHEC asks the committee to support both the inclusion of an expense-based aid for provision of school-based mental health services, and a blue ribbon commission to ensure all stakeholders can consider how to best support youth mental health in NYS for the long term.

In the lower Hudson Valley, and across the state of New York, superintendents and school board members are grateful for the additional funding through Foundation Aid and the federal ARPA relief package that has permitted our school districts to provide additional support to our students in both academics and mental health and wellness.