

2018 Advocacy Agenda: Flexibility and Sustainability Talking Points

Since 1976, The Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) has been a regional public education advocacy voice and resource for the 77 school districts in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties. The Lower Hudson Education Coalition has developed an Advocacy Agenda based on the principle that public education is at the core of our democracy. We encourage superintendents and board members to use this document as a resource when meeting with legislators and/or community members.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS MATTER!

By welcoming all children without exception, public school districts hold the promise of a level playing field for equal opportunity and a path to success for all. Public education is a public responsibility, guaranteed by the New York Constitution's requirement that the state provide a sound basic education to all children. Our schools are vibrant centers of learning that offer an array of programs and services to meet the needs of our diverse population. Public school districts are the schools of choice, serving 9 out of 10 students across America, over 2.5 million of whom attend school districts in NY State.

To invest in the next generation, State leaders must:

- Commit to a clear vision of a quality, well-rounded education
- Support that vision with adequate, equitable, dependable, and predictable funding
- Protect public schools from financial and economic uncertainty
- Stop funneling taxpayer money to private, parochial, and charter schools
- Insulate education from shifting political interests
- Allow school district management the flexibility and autonomy to maximize the effective use of resources and better reflect community values and priorities.

FOUNDATION AID

The Foundation Aid formula was frozen in 2008 and increases in recent years continue to be calculated using base-year factors, thereby not reflecting current parameters or changing student demographics.

- Implement an operating aid formula based on updated enrollment, district wealth, and student need, while also ensuring that districts that lost enrollment during the years Foundation Aid was frozen are not harmed because of a distorted system. (NYSSBA, 2017).
- Over three-quarters of the districts in our four-county region will receive less than 100% of the Foundation Aid due to them under the formula, and one-third will receive less than 60% of the Foundation Aid they are due.
- 70% of the districts in the LHEC area will only get the minimum Foundation Aid increase of 0.25% (2018 minimum increase as set in the Executive Budget). This is inadequate to maintain programs and meet mandated and contractual obligations.

TAX LEVY CAP

The NYS tax levy cap has been in place for five years, and modifications that better reflect the fiscal realities and ensure the long-term sustainability of school districts are long overdue.

- Provide for an "allowable levy growth factor" of at least 2% rather than using an annual CPI.

- Propose a more workable “carryover” provision than currently in place, giving districts an incentive to hold tax levy increases below their “maximum allowable tax levy” in years when they can, knowing they can apply that carryover in tighter years (NYSCOSS, 2018).
- The lack of predictability makes it difficult for districts to plan and is confusing to taxpayers.
- The base for New York’s tax cap has been below 2% for four consecutive years.

TRS RESERVE FUND

School districts have ERS reserve for NYS non-instructional staff pension costs, but are not permitted to reserve funds for NYS teacher and administrator pension costs (TRS).

- Permit school districts to reserve funds for New York State teacher and administrator pension costs (TRS), as is currently allowed for state non-instructional staff pension costs (ERS).
- An annual increase in the NY State prescribed TRS employer contribution rate (estimated to increase from 9.8% to 10.63% in 2018-19) can eat into a district’s budget, and may thus trigger cuts to student programs and services in order to stay under the allowable tax levy limit.
- Pension Reserve Fund flexibility will provide school districts the opportunity to minimize the impact of a significant annual pension increase on student programs in a given year.
- State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli has recommended that school districts be given authority to establish reserves for their TRS obligations.

ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW (APPR)

The moratorium will end with the 2019-2020 school year, so NYS must take action to develop a research-based evaluation system that promotes teacher learning and professional growth.

- Appoint a committee of practitioners who have studied or are deeply familiar with 3012-d to draft a set of improvements.
- Ultimately, legislation should allow districts to use multiple measures to inform the accuracy of classroom observations. Those include student surveys, artifacts (such as student portfolios), lesson plans, locally developed assessments, parental interactions, student interactions outside of the classroom, participation in and collegial support for professional practice, unit design, and other research-based indices.

REGIONAL COST

Our districts are located in New York State’s highest cost area (and among the Nation’s highest). This is reflected both in increased costs for staffing and school district operations and in higher living expenses for the families who live in our communities.

- We must ensure that a current, appropriate regional cost index (RCI) value is applied to all aid formulas and funding eligibility criteria.
- The State still uses the SED 2006 Regional Cost Index rather than the 2012 data. The 2006 RCI of 1.314 for the Hudson Valley Region means that \$1,000 has the purchasing power of \$761. SED’s updated 2012 Index of 1.407 indicates a further increase in our regional cost of operations, which translates into a reduction of our purchasing power down to \$711.
- The SED building aid formula uses a County Index that is updated annually.

Resources:

NYSSBA Advocacy Agenda: [Document](#); • NYSCOSS 2017 Sustainability Agenda: [Document](#)

APPR: [Document](#) • Data Items: [2012 Regional Cost Index](#); [Construction Cost Index](#); [Foundation Aid](#)