



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION

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Governor Kathy Hochul
State of New York
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

November 18, 2021

RE: S.6516-A/A.8013 – Creates the calculation by which to determine yearly tuition and regional rate reimbursement for approved school-age and preschool special education programs.

Dear Governor Hochul:

On behalf of the Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC), which is a joint project of the Lower Hudson Council of School Superintendents, Dutchess County School Boards Association, Rockland County School Boards Association and Westchester Putnam School Boards Association and represents six of the nine Special Act School Districts (SASDs) as members, we respectfully request that you sign S.6516-A (Mannion)/A.8013 (Benedetto) into law.

Special Act School Districts are public schools that were created by an act of the NYS legislature in the late 1960s to ensure equal access to public education for 3,000 students from 62 New York State counties. Special Act Public Schools exist to educate students from the very poorest zip codes in New York State with learning challenges that require small classes, intensive counseling and guidance. They serve students unable to attend community schools due to disabilities, illnesses or behavioral challenges. Students are sent to SASDs by the state Office of Mental Health, the state Office of Children and Family Services, the court system, social services, and local committees on special education.

This bill aligns annual funding increases for SASDs, 853 and 4410 schools with the general increases in Foundation Aid for all other public schools, creating parity between SASDs and other public schools to address the significant financial stability challenges that these schools have faced for years.

Students in special act districts have previously suffered neglect, endured physical and sexual abuse, have been taken from parents who were unable to care for them, or have severe learning disabilities because of their own emotional and behavioral problems. In addition to students who have had to deal with serious family issues, the student population includes children diagnosed with autism, emotional disturbances, severe acting-out behaviors, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injuries, and alcohol or substance abuse.

However, for decades the lack of investment and resources from the state has led to significant challenges for many of the original SASDs and ultimately resulted in eleven SASDs closing their doors. Today there are only nine SASDs remaining across the state.

This legislation, which passed both Houses of Legislature unanimously, would provide significant assistance to maintaining the viability of these schools.

For these reasons, we urge you to sign S.6516-A (Mannion)/A.8013 (Benedetto), to ensure that our districts who serve the most vulnerable youth in the state receive equitable funding increases.