



LOWER HUDSON EDUCATION COALITION
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2025 NYS Advocacy Agenda

The Lower Hudson Education Coalition (LHEC) is a collaborative initiative of the local superintendents and school board associations across Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties. The coalition advocates on behalf of 96 school districts, educating over 285,000 students and serving more than 2.1 million community members.

State Aid: *Legislative revisions to the NYS Foundation Aid formula should consider the adequacy and equity of funding school districts and ensure a transparent and predictable base of operational aid.*

- **Use updated data in the Foundation Aid formula**, while ensuring that districts are protected from downward trends and high volatility in inputs and outcomes from year to year. While we support the use of updated data, the impact on individual school districts of the proposals in the Rockefeller Institute Foundation Aid study warrant further attention. Additionally, we believe a **regional cost index** must be included that accurately reflects the Lower Hudson Valley.
- **Maintain the policy of save harmless** to ensure no districts suffer negative consequences while **fully reviewing the formula** to incorporate the current needs of schools and to recognize the impacts of changes to the foundation aid formula as it relates to the property tax cap.
- **Maintain adequate funding levels for current expense-based aids** and support the addition of an **expense-based aid stream to fund special education** outside of Foundation Aid.
- Support the recommendation of the Rockefeller Institute on **establishing a new categorical aid for mental health services and for funding the EV bus transition**.
- **Establish a mechanism to regularly re-evaluate and update the Foundation Aid formula** going forward. We are supportive of the Center for Educational Equity plan for an ongoing commission to regularly re-evaluate the formula.

Tax Cap Revisions: *In 2011 when the Property Tax Cap was first enacted, school districts and local governments were promised mandate relief to facilitate the ability to comply with the tax cap. That has failed to materialize. A review of the tax levy cap formula and provisions is overdue since the legislation was passed in 2011.*

- Allow districts to **apply unused allowable tax levy** for three subsequent years to balance needs of schools & taxpayers.
- Amend the current formula to exempt **increases in pension contributions or health care costs** significantly over the property tax levy limit.
- Simplify the **tax cap formula** to address incongruities such as eliminating negative tax levy caps and reducing the impact of annual changes in the use of reserves or transfers to capital.
- Modify the tax levy cap calculation to **begin with inflation**, instead of CPI to a maximum of 2%.
- Account for **enrollment growth** in the calculation.
- Establish a **tax levy cap working group** to review the formula.

Student Mental Health: *The increasing mental health needs of our students are a barrier to their academic learning and must be addressed within school walls and in the broader community.*

- Create an **expense-based aid for student mental health** services or contractual services provided in a school setting.
- Support **community behavioral health providers** to meet the growing needs of students and families.

School Safety: *Security of school buildings continues to be a key issue that parents and building administrators worry about constantly. Districts face difficulties hiring staff to ensure security and deal effectively with young people in a protective role.*

- Ensure additional **flexible resources for school safety**, including funding for staffing, security upgrades, and training.
- Waive the **allowable salary cap** for retired police officers who work as school resource officers or school security.
- Consider **exemptions in the property tax levy cap** for security costs.
- Improve coordination and streamline reporting amongst agencies tasked with assisting districts with **cybersecurity**.

Mandate Relief and Transparency: *A thorough review of existing mandates and increased transparency prior to the enactment of new mandates would assist school districts in managing the significant cost burdens of compliance. In the current inflationary environment, reducing requirements on school districts will assist with cost control when prices are expected to continue to rise.*

- Require a **complete fiscal note**, prepared by a NYS actuary, in each education-related bill, prior to passing legislation.
- Establish an **'Education Mandate Relief Redesign Team'** similar to efforts undertaken by the State in 2011. This redesign team should be tasked with reviewing ways to reduce the costs of unfunded mandates.

- Increase **flexibility in use of reserve funds** to improve fiscal planning, including permitting reserves for long-term costs such as other post-employment benefits (OPEB).
- Create a **fund for payouts under the Child Victim's Act** beyond insurance available for districts.
- Move **burden of proof** for parentally placed students from the school district to the parents.

Special Act Public School Districts (SASD): *SASDs are public school districts that provide specialized services to some of NYS's most challenged students whose individual needs cannot be met in their home district. Measures are needed to ensure the fiscal and programmatic stability of Special Act public school districts.*

- Revise the **tuition rate-setting process** promptly based on the ongoing study results.
- Award SASDs an **interim plus tuition rate annually** on July 1st, to permit budgeting with approved growth rates.
- **Eliminate the direct/indirect cost screen**, or at least, adjust **security costs** to be included as direct care costs.

Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES): *The BOCES provide services and programs primarily to component districts within their region that would be cost-ineffective for individual districts to undertake. BOCES are a key source of educational programs in career and technical education (CTE), special education and adult education throughout the state.*

- Increase the **salary cap** for career and technical education (CTE) teachers.
- Permit a two-week window in the timing of component district **BOCES budget votes**.
- Permit BOCES to hold **funds in reserve**, similar to other school districts, to help with long-term planning.
- Revisit the **District Superintendent salary cap**.

Climate Resiliency: *School districts want to ensure that their facilities and infrastructure are environmentally friendly and can withstand the demands of a changing climate. Aging buildings need improvements to allow for a comfortable and safe environment with the probability of increased heat and flooding, while districts look to comply with the zero-emission bus mandate.*

- Provide enhanced funding to support capital projects improving **climate resiliency or energy efficiency of schools**, including climate control projects to improve the educational experience on hot days.
- Create a **coordination process for EV bus implementation** to actively collect data on the process, timing and availability of vehicles, infrastructure and electricity.
- Amend the Education Law to make all costs incurred with the installation of **electric vehicle charging stations** an allowable transportation expense.
- Amend Section 3602 of the Education Law to **provide enhanced transportation aid** for school districts to offset the increased costs of leasing and purchasing zero-emission buses.
- Smooth the **transition to zero-emission bus fleets**, by making service contracts with firms managing the transition to EV buses aidable.
- **Permit use of hybrid buses** as an interim step, and potentially long term option for extended trips.

Pre-Kindergarten Growth and Success: *Ensuring all preschool-age children have access to a high-quality, affordable pre-K program is a worthy goal. Adequate state funding is critical in public school districts where a clear need has been identified.*

- **Consolidate pre-K grant programs** into a single annual funding stream that can be deployed for 4-year-old programs and 3-year-old programs, and amend the current law to include a **cost inflation factor** in per pupil allocations.
- Increase **flexibility** in the use of pre-K aid to ensure that districts can productively use these funds to support early learners.
- Amend the current law to make **pre-K transportation an aidable expense** for school districts, like K-12 transportation.
- Continue to allow school districts to 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.

School District Operations: *To ensure operational efficiency, school districts need increased flexibility in developing school calendars and clarity around legal and regulatory requirements, especially for transportation.*

- Empower districts to adopt **cell-phone policies locally** that are focused on developmentally appropriate student mental health and educational needs.
- Permit flexibility in the hour and day requirements of the **aidable school calendar** to allow districts to provide additional holidays in diverse communities, & experiment with alternative calendar options.
- Add to statute or regulation the requirements on public school districts for **transportation services for non-public students**.
- Improve **school election operations** by discontinuing second petitioning period when a school board candidate drops out.

Employee Retention and Recruitment: *As NYS considers amendments to civil service procedures in the coming budget year, school districts are looking at how the process affects employee recruitment and retention in a school district setting. The ongoing teacher shortage requires both legislative and regulatory solutions to assist districts in ensuring qualified teachers in every classroom.*

- **Reform civil service testing and hiring** procedures to allow for prompt hiring of staff into key positions.
- Focus on improving **ease of certification and flexibility in certification areas** to improve teacher shortage.