

TESTIMONY

Joint Legislative Hearing of the
NEW YORK STATE
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
&
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Executive Budget Proposals for Education
Thursday, January 29, 2025



THE COUNCIL OF SCHOOL SUPERVISORS AND ADMINISTRATORS
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Greetings to Assemblymember Pretlow, Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Benedetto, Senator Mayer, Senator Liu, and your honorable colleagues. It is a pleasure to be with you today, and we are grateful for your continued support over the years.

My name is Henry Rubio, and I am the President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA), offering this testimony on behalf of approximately 6,500 in-service and 11,000 retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Administrators, and Supervisors working in New York City public schools and four conversion charter schools. CSA is also the collective bargaining unit for nearly 200 Early Childhood Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Early Childhood Education Centers.

I am also here in partnership with our state affiliate, the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). We proudly stand with our SAANYS colleagues on the issues they also raise before the Assembly and Senate and look forward to our continued joint advocacy for the students of our great state.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the Executive Budget for State Fiscal Year 2026.

School Aid & Foundation Aid

We thank the Governor for her initial proposal which fully funds the Foundation Aid Formula by providing an estimated \$26.4 billion. We're glad that our collective advocacy in recent years resulted in a robust conversation around long-needed changes to the formula. We commend the intention behind replacing the decades-old census poverty factor with a three-year average of the small area income and poverty estimates (SAIPE) count and replacing the free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) counts with a three-year average of the economically disadvantaged count. Unfortunately, the former proposal will disproportionately hurt New York City schools if implemented without consideration of other recommendations put forth by our union and other stakeholders. According to the Rockefeller Institute report, switching from the 2000 Census Bureau poverty count to a three-year average SAIPE

data would impact New York City the most out of any district in the state, decreasing the Foundation Aid funding by nearly \$400 million.

We believe that the Foundation Aid Formula needs other long overdue changes that we have been advocating for over the last year. To truly meet the needs of our students, the formula must be further revised to reflect current student demographics, shifts in education policy, rising educational costs, and the lasting impacts of the pandemic.

Temporary Housing Weights: The current Foundation Aid formula does not adequately address the unique challenges faced by students in temporary housing and the foster care system. The number of homeless public-school students in New York City has recently reached an all-time high of nearly 120,000, meaning that approximately 1 in every 9 students is homeless. Since April 2022, New York City has seen an influx of nearly 40,000 asylum-seeking students, many of whom need specific support services, including access to bilingual staff, translation services, mental health resources, and temporary housing coordinators. The Foundation Aid formula must ensure that these students—and others in temporary housing—have the stability and support necessary to succeed academically. As many of these new arrivals are also English-language learners, the formula must also provide for relevant support services to ensure their lack of proficiency does not impede their learning.

Special Education Weights: There are over 200,000 students with disabilities in New York City who deserve a fair and equitable education. The current formula applies the same weight to all special education students, regardless of whether the students have physical or intellectual disabilities as articulated in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The formula must reflect the varying levels of support required by different students. We urge the State to increase the special education weights and create tiered weights to ensure that resources are allocated to meet the specific needs of all students.

Regional Cost Indexes: The regional cost indexes that are part of the Foundation Aid formula, which account for varying labor costs across different regions of the state, have remained unchanged since the formula's creation. Meanwhile, the cost of living and operating schools in New York City

has increased significantly. The current federal poverty threshold for a family of four is just over \$30,000, which means something very different for a family in New York City due to the cost of living. The State regularly updates the building aid formula with a higher regional cost adjustment, and the Foundation Aid formula should receive the same consideration to reflect the true, elevated cost of educating students in New York City.

The Foundation Aid formula is critical in ensuring that every child in New York City has access to a high-quality education. State funding currently only covers about 37% of the total costs for New York City education, whereas it was split evenly with city funding twenty years ago. We look forward to partnering to ensure that New York City receives its fair share of state funding to meet the current, complex needs of our students and that funds are allocated equitably.

Class Size Law

Once again, the proposed state budget doesn't consider the financial impacts of the class size law on New York City schools. As a result, too many school leaders will be left without the resources to ensure a safe and high-quality education for all students, and schools will be forced to abandon programming that families have come to rely on. CSA fully supports smaller class sizes; however, without additional funding and space, the prescribed limits will lead to the displacement of students and severe program cuts.

While our public school system already meets the class size caps prescribed for the 2024-2025 school year, our union and its in-service members have serious concerns about the future implementation of this law for too many schools in the 2025-2026 school year and beyond. Our School Construction Authority has estimated it would cost tens of billions of dollars to create the required classroom space. To comply with this law by 2028, New York City must hire 9,000 new teachers at an annual cost of \$1.3 billion to \$1.9 billion, according to the DOE and the Independent Budget Office. The city, too, must subsequently hire additional administrators to supervise all these new teachers, which is not currently accounted for in DOE or IBO estimations.

We have heard directly from hundreds of New York City principals who either don't have the necessary funds to hire the additional teachers required

by the new law or don't have enough space to break students up into additional classes. This year, we have collaborated with the city to develop a process to provide some schools with additional funding to enable them to comply with the law in the later years of the phase-in plan. However, this additional funding is not nearly enough to bring the entire system into compliance and reducing class sizes will unfortunately force school leaders to cut resources from extracurricular activities, valuable enrichment, and/or intervention programs in their schools. What makes matters worse is that the loss of resources will more than likely harm our most vulnerable students in high-need communities. If schools must hire these additional teachers from within their existing budget, and without an increase in funding, schools may no longer have enough money for social workers, arts programs, and additional support for unique student populations.

School Leader Professional Development

CSA's Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) is recognized for providing high quality professional development for school leaders in New York City. As the need for more school leaders grows each year, the demand for a diverse array of programming is also increasing. CSA is advocating for an increase to the Executive Leadership Institute for an additional \$750 thousand dollars, to support the following ELI initiatives:

- To expand ELI's professional development services for school leaders.
- To support school leaders in the training and implementation of curricula and instructional practices aligned to the science of reading.
- To provide all school leaders with training in applying restorative practices and implementing vital mental health programs.
- To provide a robust mentoring and coaching program to first-year principals through one-on-one exchanges as they assume the heavy responsibility of running their schools for the first time.
- To enhance the School Leadership Institute, our three-year educational program that supports newly assigned Assistant Principals, Education Administrators, and Early Childhood Directors.

Similarly, we must expand our Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals (ALPAP), to attract and support school leaders considering

becoming a school principal. As always, we believe there is far too much turnover in school leadership throughout our city. Too many school leaders depart the system earlier than expected due to burnout from the mental, emotional, and physical toll that the job has taken on them and their families.

ALPAP helps school leaders and administrators develop leadership skills aligned with the NYCDOE School Leadership Competencies and supports them on their path to becoming principals. Components of the program include seminars, action research, in-person field experiences at colleagues' schools, and a mentor who is a current principal. Throughout the year-long program, participants expand their skill set, develop confidence, and grow a network for support and follow-up.

There is no entity that has done more to recruit, train, and retain principals than ELI. As our system faces increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining principals, we ask that you also increase the state's investment for ELI's flagship principal preparation program, ALPAP, with an additional \$500 thousand dollars.

School Safety & An Assistant Principal in Every School

The safety of students and staff is an urgent concern for CSA. A wave of violence and tragedy has affected our students, their families, and our school communities this past year, with some even leading to loss of life. We have seen significant upticks in incidents that typically result in suspension, in the number of weapons being confiscated in our school buildings, and in assaults against students, teachers, and administrators.

School leaders maintain a positive daily environment in every school and provide for fair and equitable discipline to help students improve their personal and academic development. Administrators are also responsible for emergency situations – whether related to instruction, facilities, or threats to students and staff. An adequate level of administrative staffing in school buildings is essential for the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff.

All New York City assistant principals are appointed through a hiring process that requires the input of teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders

who deeply understand their value. For anyone who has ever spent time in a school building, it is immediately clear how profoundly assistant principals impact schools. They help maintain appropriate school climate, maintain compliance, lead professional development to shape instructional focus, conduct teacher evaluations, manage curricular and extracurricular activities, and promote student achievement and school performance, among many other responsibilities. Most importantly, assistant principals help provide for the security of school communities, the appropriate supervision of staff and personnel, and the proper management of school buildings.

However, there are still schools in New York City without an assistant principal and these schools face serious safety concerns as a result. CSA supports legislation to require an Assistant Principal in every school building in New York City; S.1397 (Liu)/A.2605 (Hyndman).

Cell Phone Policy

School leaders know firsthand that the excessive use of cell phones can have harmful effects, including disruptions in schools and distractions from learning. We support the Governor's efforts to limit the use of cell phones during school hours, and we look forward to working with her to develop a policy that makes sense for New York City's schools and provides our members with the flexibility they believe is important. We believe there must be consistent protocols for collecting phones, along with meaningful measures for students that ignore the policy, and we are pleased the current proposal requires methods for parents to contact students during the day. As we work together to finalize a bill, we must include sufficient funding to support schools with the necessary resources and staffing for successful implementation.

Proposed Investments

We fully support the Governor's vision to achieve universal childcare throughout the state. New York City's Universal 3K and Pre-K programs have been a lifeline for working families, and we look forward to collaborating with the New Coalition for Child Care to identify sustainable sources of

funding that might aid families beyond the federal income cap of 85 percent of State Median Income.

Student's health and well-being is the guiding priority of our union's members, and we commend the governor for her proposed investments in school-based health centers, mental health support grants, and the \$1.5 million investment in school mental health programs.

School leaders know that students simply can't learn if they are hungry; we applaud the proposal to include \$376 million dollars, an increase of \$196 million, to support the implementation of Universal School Meals.

Lastly, school leaders know that after-school and extended day programs are often critical to keep children safe, and we commend the proposed investments of nearly \$25 million for extended day/school safety programs, over \$20 million to support school-wide extended learning, and a \$6.4 million increase in OCFS administered afterschool, raising the total to \$109.7 million.

Community Schools and Tech Programs

The Executive Budget proposes to maintain the current community schools at the same levels as last year (approximately \$250 million statewide) and would also provide \$1.2 million for Technical Assistance Centers. Community Schools are lifelines to disadvantaged communities, and we believe additional funding is needed.

Community Schools have transformed school buildings into community hubs to deliver academic, health, mental health, nutrition and counseling services to students and their families. They work because they confront problems that are largely societal issues outside the school building. Students must come to school ready to learn - and this can only happen if we recognize the limitations too many schoolchildren unfortunately face every day. These schools address challenges of historically underserved families related to poverty, homelessness, medical/dental issues, nutrition, and more. Through additional academic support, family engagement, and extended learning time, community school students attend school more often, score higher on statewide exams, and earn more credits annually than non-community school students.

The Executive Budget also proposes to appropriate \$64.575 million to continue support for existing Smart Scholars, Smart Transfer and P-TECH programs, \$12 million of which would be used to support the new College in High School Opportunity Fund, a statewide dual enrollment policy to provide high school students with the opportunity to enroll in college courses and earn transferable college credits while completing high school graduation and diploma requirements. However, we believe the state should invest additional funding in Career and Technical Education (CTE).

Our city's CTE programs are among the best in the nation, empowering our students with necessary skills for college and career success. They have proven to benefit students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, improving equity within our system. The \$3,900 per pupil formula-based funding cap that NYC students receive through Special Services Aid does not fully cover the actual costs of running these specialized programs, and CSA asks the state to increase that cap. In addition, 9th-grade students are currently excluded from funding; we urge that the state increase funding to provide our youngest high school students with earlier exposure to CTE.

Conversion Charter Schools

CSA represents four unionized, conversion charter schools. CSA recommends the creation of a new category of support: "Conversion Charter School Supplemental Aid." Our unionized conversion charter schools continue to bear "legacy" costs that date from pre-conversion. Our charter school members report that pension and health insurance costs have risen dramatically in recent years and can now comprise 12% to 22% of the entire operating budget for each school. These costs are not covered under the regular charter school funding process, and financial relief – which would cost the State approximately \$3,000,000 per year - is urgently needed to protect the retirements of unionized teachers, supervisors, and other staff.

Cost of Living Adjustment for Retirees

Caps placed on COLA-covered benefits erode the retirement income of affected retirees. Medical costs in particular - including co-payments, premiums, and medication - have risen at a rate far higher than increases in

the consumer price index (CPI). CSA supports legislation to provide cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) to retirement system members. A COLA will enable retirees to combat inflation and maintain their standard of living. Survivors' benefits should also be kept current. CSA supports S.6252 (Jackson) and A.6638 (Pheffer-Amato).

Conclusion

Our members are deeply grateful to our state leaders for your support of our work. During your upcoming budget negotiations, we urge the Legislature to continue to advocate for students, teachers, and school leaders as you always have. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Sincerely,

Henry D. Rubio
