



Buffalo♦New York City♦Rochester♦Syracuse♦Yonkers♦Mount Vernon♦Utica

2019-2020 STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES

1. **A minimum increase of \$1.2 billion in funding over the Executive Budget is needed.**

The Conference of Big 5 School Districts and the other members of the Educational Conference Board have put forth a proposal calling for a year-to-year school aid increase of \$2.2 billion.

These additional resources are critical as all of the Big 5 member school districts are heavily reliant on State funds. The large city school districts have no ability to raise local revenue given their fiscal dependency and Mount Vernon and Utica are limited by the tax cap imposed upon independent school districts.

2. **The Foundation Aid phase-in must be accelerated and flexibility maintained.**

The State must provide school districts with an expedited Foundation Aid phase-in and commit to a funding formula that is transparent and affords school districts predictability. Students in the Big 5 member school districts should not have to wait for equitable educational opportunities.

School districts should also be granted maximum flexibility for community schools set-aside amounts under Foundation Aid.

3. **The Executive Budget's proposed Equity Plan requirements must be rejected.**

The Executive Budget's proposed Equity Plan requirements could have significant negative unintended consequences. All of the Big 5 school districts are overwhelmingly poor and this proposal would strip school districts of the authority to make building level spending determinations. These decisions are best managed at the local level by school leaders who understand the unique needs of the pupils they serve.

The mandated school-based expenditure reporting requirements enacted last year imposed a significant administrative burden on affected school districts and the utility of these reports remains questionable as there are a multitude of factors that must be considered in order to compare schools in a meaningful way. Furthermore, school-based expenditure reports are already mandated under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act for federal, State and local dollars and each of the Big 5 school districts are subject to numerous other financial accountability measures including Contract for Excellence expenditure requirements, set-asides under Foundation Aid and State and federal programs and fiscal audits.

4. **The Executive Budget's proposed merger of eleven expense-based aids must be rejected.**

The Executive Budget's proposed merger of eleven expense-based aids including Transportation and Special Services Aids into a new category with annual growth based upon inflation and enrollment could be detrimental to school district budgeting. These categories of aid should remain linked to actual expenditures to ensure school districts are not forced to divert resources from the classroom in order to cover increased expenses in areas such as transportation.

17 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207
Tel: 518-465-4274
Big5@big5schools.org

5. **Additional funding is necessary for English Language Learners (ELLs).**

The State must provide more support for ELL students through a designated categorical program and an expansion of the weighting for ELL pupils under Foundation Aid.

The Conference's seven school districts educate 45% of New York State's K-12 public school students including 66% of the ELL student population. Furthermore, the majority of pupils who are newly arrived to the United States, including many refugee students, are educated in member school districts.

6. **Special Services Aid and Career and Technical Education funds must be expanded.**

The \$3,900 per pupil formula-based funding cap under Special Services Aid must be increased and reimbursement should be adjusted to capture 9th grade students. In addition, more resources should be provided to enable Mount Vernon and Utica to expand in-district Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

The New York State Board of Regents adopted Multiple Pathways to High School Graduation with the goal of expanding the delivery of CTE and improving graduation rates. The Big 5 member school districts are interested in building upon some of their extraordinarily successful CTE programs.

7. **School Health Services funding must be restored, expanded and increased.**

The Executive Budget cuts school health funding by \$1.2 million for the Buffalo and Rochester school districts. These cuts must be restored and increases provided for all school districts receiving School Health Services funds (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers). In addition, funding must be expanded to include New York City, Mount Vernon and Utica. School Health Services funding has not kept pace with student health and medical needs and the growing programmatic requirements imposed on school health personnel.

The Conference supports the Executive Budget's inclusion of funding for Mental Health Support Grants and call for expansion of these programs in future years.

8. **Charter school expansion must be limited and the funding system altered.**

Charter school expansion in saturated school districts must be limited and enhanced accountability measures applied to charter schools to ensure that there is greater budget transparency and oversight is provided upon dissolution.

In addition, supplemental charter school tuition payments must be increased to protect school districts from scheduled tuition increases and accelerated in order to enable school districts to receive current year reimbursement. Lastly, Charter School Transitional Aid must be expanded to capture conversion and district-sponsored charter schools and extended beyond three years for all schools.

9. **Additional targeted funding is needed for ongoing professional development.**

Additional resources are necessary for teacher and principal training and professional development initiatives for the Big 5 non-component school districts.

There is currently no targeted funding for these vital programs, which are essential to improving instructional quality and student outcomes as districts move forward with implementation of the Board of Regents' Next Generation Learning Standards.

Celebrating our 60th Anniversary!