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NEW YORK STATE
SCHOOL FACILITIES ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY

by

New York State School Facilities Association
(Formerly, NYS Association of Superintendents of School Buildings & Grounds)

Submitted to
Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Hearing on the FY 2015-16 Executive Budget

Tuesday, February 3, 2015

On behalf of the 600 School Facilities Professionals – members of *New York State School Facility Association* – who represent over 700 of New York’s public school districts and 36 BOCES, we are grateful for the opportunity to submit written testimony to share with you our thoughts regarding the Governor’s proposed 2015-16 Executive Budget and present our 2015 legislative and budget priorities.

The New York State School Facilities Association is a professional organization comprised of dedicated men and women responsible for maintaining and operating thousands of school facilities across our state. NYSSFA members are committed to ensuring the safety, health and comfort of the students and staff.

Building Aid

2012-2013 - \$2.714 Billion
 2013-2014 - \$2.746 Billion
 2014-2015 - \$2.765 Billion

(based on current data from State aid)

There are over 3,050 school buildings in New York State. These buildings are the places of learning and growth for over 2.7 million students and must be consistently conducive to learning. This means they must have adequate space, equipment and capacity. They must be clean, bright, safe and appropriately maintained.

TOOLS FOR TOMORROW’S SCHOOLS

School facilities professionals struggle in this era of "Race to the Top", APPR and tax caps to convince stakeholders that an investment today in maintenance, energy efficiency and training will reap savings for many years to come. We work hard every day to maintain facilities that are inviting and suitable places of learning; that communicate to our students and staff that what they do in these rooms is important. But all too often our mission, our passion, becomes a struggle just to get by, to find a way. As we strive to provide essential services, too often we can only provide a “make-do” answer. This just doesn't make sense for our members, our students, our staffs or our communities. Our members pride themselves on solving problems and we impart that logic in our advocacy.

Education is changing. As such our facilities must be able to adapt to those changes in a fiscally responsible way that takes into consideration maintenance, energy, and eventual replacement or upgrades. It takes a professional with knowledge of current best practices in efficiency, green products, procurement, and management to ensure that the funds invested in school facilities and grounds meet the needs of students, faculty and our communities.

On any given day, a school facilities professional might create infrastructure, maintain quality spaces, or fix equipment. Our members pride themselves on solving problems and impart that logic in our advocacy.

NYSSFA asks for your consideration of the following recommendations:

SUPPORT THE OFFICE OF FACILITY MANAGEMENT AT THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

All construction of new buildings, additions, alterations or modernization of district-owned buildings, purchase of existing structures for school purposes, and for lease and installment purchase payments under certain circumstance are reviewed, approved and supported by the NYSED Office of Facility Management. This office is staffed by highly qualified professionals, including engineers and architects. Unfortunately, staff positions in this office have been reduced dramatically. . The result? There is a current backlog of school construction projects waiting for approval. As of January 2015, there is a 6 month backlog representing approximately 820 projects. Based on current year expenditures, this equates to approximately \$825 million dollars in school construction costs delayed.¹

Funding Estimate

Fill Current Vacancies (6 FTE)
\$587,311

Support 10 New Positions
\$1,029,476

Delay of projects has health, safety, and security implications for students statewide, as well as impacts regarding educational achievement. Delays also represent a significant productivity loss to the state with thousands of construction jobs across the state delayed in every community. There is an associated loss of employee/employer tax revenue.

To compound the backlog, it is anticipated that many Smart Schools Bond Act projects will be subject to building permit review² and will also impact the current backlog within the Office of Facility Management. In turn the increasing backlog will cause significant delays to both traditional and bond act projects.

According to a 2004 staffing study, the office had 23 full time staff. Currently, the office has 14 full time staff, a decrease of 39% in the last 10 years. The Office has proposed an organizational chart that will allow the appropriate functioning of the office, eliminate the backlog and ensure compliance with law and regulation. It requires the filling of 6 current vacancies, and the creation of 10 new architectural, engineering, project management, and auditing positions. The costs are based on current PEF and CSEA starting salaries and include a 50% increase for fringe benefits.

NYSSFA recommends investing \$1,616,787 to fully fund the annual costs to remedy the staffing issues and resulting backlog in the NYSED Office of Facility Management.³

¹ Current construction escalation is approximately 3.2% per year, therefore because most of the projects will be forced to wait a full year to avoid doing construction during occupied school periods, a full year's escalation will be incurred at 3.2% or \$825M (.032) = an additional \$26M

² Construction of pre-k space, construction of permanent space to replace modular trailers, technology wiring, etc.

³ This number represents approximately .06 % of the annual value of building aid managed by the office.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL FACILITY PROFESSIONALS

School facilities and grounds are more dynamic and complex than ever before. The infusion of technology, the need for energy efficiency and green maintenance requires that Directors of School Facilities to have access to current best practices through ongoing professional development. **NYSFSA recommends an investment of \$100,000 to support professional development for Directors of School Facilities at the School Facility Management Institute (SFMI).** Created in 2003, SFMI as a non-profit was developed to provide education and training programs on timely school facilities management issues. Support of SFMI will expand the education and training to emerging areas such as advanced technology, integrated pest management techniques, energy efficient products, and green procurement practices. In addition, the support will help us reach more professionals across the state.

ENERGY RESERVE FUND

Energy costs are a wild card for school districts. The cost of the commodity is very difficult to predict. Districts use many tools to address price fluctuations such as purchasing cooperatives. However, despite any other factor that effects a child's education, the lights and heat must be on in the building to provide our children with a sound education in a safe environment. Unfortunately the volatility of energy costs makes it extremely difficult for school districts to plan and budget effectively. **NYSSFA supports the establishment of an energy reserve fund** (A.1677 by Assemblymember Cahill).

MAINTENANCE FUNDING

The 2% tax cap has made it difficult for our members to advance conservation measures. While retro-fitting, upgrading and management measures all result in short (3-5 year) returns on investments Boards of Education are hesitant to use current year funding on increased maintenance. **NYSSFA supports the establishment of a minimum standard for maintenance funding and allow school districts to make their investments outside the restrictions of the property tax cap.** (A.3401 by Assemblymember Englebright)

BOCES CAPITAL PROJECTS

Current law allows school districts to exclude bonding for capital projects from the tax cap. However, the law failed to include the bonding for BOCES capital projects. The bonding for BOCES capital projects falls within local school districts' budget as well. Without including these costs from the tax cap, school districts are unable to approve much-needed BOCES capital projects. **NYSSFA recommends resolving this oversight by placing the bonding for BOCES capital projects outside the tax cap.**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY GRANT

Investments increase cost efficiencies through use of innovative smart technologies, green energy applications such as solar panels, and the commitment to maintenance will reap long terms savings. Unfortunately, some schools do not have the financial stability or extra dollars to make such investments themselves. **NYSSFA recommends dedicating \$25 million of the settlement funds to supports a new “Energy Efficiency Grant Program” that would provide school districts one-time resources to purchase energy efficient products/equipment to promote long term productivity and savings.**

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the New York State School Facility Association, we would like to thank you for your continued support of clean, healthy, well maintained school facilities and the opportunity to offer our professional insight.

Respectfully submitted,

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