



NEW YORK STATE
SCHOOL FACILITIES ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY

By

NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL FACILITIES ASSOCIATION
(FKA, NYS Association of Superintendents of School Buildings & Grounds)

Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Hearing on the FY 2018-19 Executive Budget

January 31, 2018

On behalf of New York State School Facilities Association (NYSSFA) and our 600 School Facilities Professional members working in the State's 728 public school districts and 37 BOCES, we are grateful for the opportunity to share our recommendations regarding the 2018-19 Executive Budget and present our 2018 priorities.

NYSSFA is a professional organization of the dedicated men and women responsible for maintaining and operating thousands of school buildings and facilities across New York. NYSSFA members are committed to ensuring the safety, health and comfort of the students and staff.

School buildings are the places of learning and growth for New York students. This means they must have adequate space, equipment and capacity. They must be clean, bright, safe and appropriately maintained.

TODAY'S SCHOOLS

Today's schools are responsive. There is an increased focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Science Technology and Math (STEM), as well as Science Technology interpreted through Engineering & Arts, all based in the elements of Math (STEAM), while recognizing a need to expose our students to education in the arts, music and drama. Each of these areas of learning requires specific space, equipment, and technology.

Wood shop was once considered a space where students were introduced to equipment and technology. Today's students are building computer networks and working on 3D printers. Students once adjusted carburetors, today, they conduct computer diagnostics on new generations of vehicles. Students no longer merely perform assembly tasks, they are designing and integrating math and physics in a project learning environment. All of these educational best practices requires flexible and collaborative spaces.

Education is constantly evolving and as school facility professionals we must be planning for tomorrow today. The conversations regarding the direction of school facility has moved beyond square footage and seating to how to develop spaces that allow teachers to facilitate student driven instruction. New York State invests tremendously in school facilities and grounds and while we are discovering and planning for innovations in tomorrow's classroom, it is also our responsibility to respect the investment and maintain our facilities. This balance is necessary to meet the needs of our students today and in years to come.

On any given day, a school facilities professional might work creating new infrastructure, maintaining quality spaces, or repairing complex equipment. Our members pride themselves on solving problems and impart that logic in our advocacy. 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.

Nothing occurs in the school building without a school facilities professional.

[NO STUDENT GOES HUNGRY](#)

The Governor's Executive budget includes support for the "Breakfast after the Bell" program. This program seeks to increase the opportunity for students to eat breakfasts by making healthy foods more accessible. As facilities professionals we are committed to working with our education partners in increasing student achievement. We do this by balancing programmatic design with implementation requirements. As more food enters our classrooms there is an increased risk of unhealthy environments unless the space is properly cleaned and maintained. We are grateful that the Executive budget include \$7 million in funding for equipment needs associated with this program, and \$5 million for increased costs associated with serving additional meals. We recommend that clarifying language is added to ensure that school districts may use the \$5 million for costs related to the increased maintenance needed to keep our educational spaces healthy and pest free.

BUILDING AID

The Executive budget includes language that limits growth of expensed based aids such as construction, transportation and BOCES aid to 2%. NYSSFA is significantly concerned about this proposal. For building aid, the cap would be a 2% cap on statewide aid. If statewide building aid calculation exceeded the 2% cap, each school district's aid would be prorated back to artificially achieve the 2% cap. This excludes NYC.

This proposal makes planning extremely challenging and eliminates voter transparency in making building project decisions. Currently, a school district is able to present a building construction proposal to its voters and say with confidence how much the state will be reimbursing for the project and how much the locality will be supporting the project. Under this proposal that certainty is eliminated since the amount of aid will be contingent on total building aid calculations and the amount a school district may receive will fluctuation year to year.

The Governor seeks to impose caps to expense based aid as a way to send more dollars into foundation aid. Capping reimbursement does not automatically impact expenses, but rather forces school districts to find alternative sources of funding which may or may not be accessible for these specific purposes.

NYSSFA is relying on our education partners to analyze data around the potential impacts of this proposal across our diverse school districts but are very concerned about the loss of transparency and ability to accurately plan.

INCREASE COST THRESHOLD FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

NYSSFA supports legislation proposed by Assembly member Thiele and Senator Seward (S.3970/A.3231), to increase the cost threshold for school construction projects. This measure would provide cost and administrative relief to districts, as well as a cost savings to the State.

Under current law, for projects wholly funded through capital outlay and which have a total cost of no more than \$100,000, districts' base year capital outlay expenses can be reimbursed through building aid. This allows districts to avoid being subject to lengthy assumed amortization schedules of ten, fifteen, and twenty years and instead receive the amount they spend as they spend it. This is helpful for districts, as they receive funding when they need it, and for the state, which then avoids paying interest on the reimbursement.

However, costs are rising, technological advances are creating greater demand for capital improvements, and districts are finding it difficult to fund these projects in real time. We ask that the FY2017-2018 State Budget contain provisions to increase the \$100,000 threshold for eligibility to a more reasonable \$250,000 in order to help districts meet these demands and to achieve savings on interest payments to the state.

NYSSFA recommends that the following language be added to the 2018-19 budget:

Subparagraph 1 of paragraph b of subdivision 6-f of section 3602 of the education law, as added by section 19 of part H of chapter 83 of the laws of 2002, is amended to read as follows:

(1) has a total project cost of [~~one hundred~~ **two hundred fifty**] thousand dollars or less; provided however, that for any district, no more than one project shall be eligible pursuant to this subparagraph for an apportionment within the same school year;

SCHOOL SAFETY FUNDS

NYSSFA supports the continuation of the NYSAFE Act proposed in the 2018-19 Executive budget, which provides enhanced aid for the purchase of stationary metal detectors, security cameras and safety devices for electrically operated partitions. NYSSFA is disappointed that BOCES are not eligible for these funds, even though BOCES serve some of the State's most vulnerable students. BOCES should receive similar health and safety investments in the future too.

NYSSFA encourages your support of the continuation of funds and recommends an additional capital investment for BOCES health and safety expenses.

BOCES CAPITAL PROJECTS

NYSSFA appreciates the Assembly and Senate for passing legislation last year to resolve the issues with the property tax cap relating to capital expenses within a BOCES budget. We are specifically grateful for the efforts of Assemblymember Galef and Senator Marcellino. NYSSFA is disappointed that Governor Cuomo vetoed the legislation. We will continue to work with our educational partners to try and find a solution and appreciate your ongoing support.

NYSSFA recommends a continued discussion on the property tax cap and the development of policies to alleviate unnecessary burdens to the system, such as for BOCES capital projects.

MAINTENANCE FUNDING

The property tax cap has made it difficult for our members to advance energy conservation measures. In this time of very limited resources and competing priorities, Boards of Education are often hesitant to use current year funding on increased maintenance. In addition, there are no minimum standards for funding maintenance. As such, many of our structures, equipment, and grounds age faster than necessary.

NYSSFA is grateful to Senator Valesky and Assemblymember Englebright for sponsoring legislation to establish a minimum standard for maintenance funding and allow school districts to make these investments outside the restrictions of the property tax cap.

NYSSFA recommends the passage of A.5530 by M.A. Englebright & S.1245 by Senator Valesky.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the New York State School Facilities Association (NYSSFA), 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.