



Testimony of the
School Administrators Association of New York State
Joint Hearing on the FY 2019-20
Executive Budget

February 6, 2019
Albany, New York

Supporting
school leaders
as they
help build
a brighter
future for
New York's
students.

Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Weinstein, Chairperson Benedetto, Chairperson Mayer, honorable members of the Legislature and distinguished staff, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding proposals contained in the Executive Budget for the fiscal year 2019-20.

My name is Cynthia Gallagher and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). SAANYS is the largest state professional association of school administrators, with membership exceeding 7,000 school leaders. Over 429 districts are represented by our association; from the tip of Long Island to the most western, southern, and northern parts of our state. Additionally, SAANYS and the New York State Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA) have a longstanding coalition, titled the New York State School Administrators Consortium (NYSSAC) to collaborate on advocacy and professional learning opportunities. On behalf of our members we want to thank you for your continued time, commitment, and support of public education.

State Aid

Background

Our association represents not only principals but members with many titles and positions in school districts. Some of the various other positions include assistant principals, directors, deans, and supervisors and no two jobs are alike. The role of a building-level administrator is unique and must meet the needs of diverse student populations, parents, communities, and boards of education. Not only are school demographics unique, so are ever-changing school climates and environments. It would be a very fair statement to say that the role of a building administrator is extremely complex, challenging, and a non-stop balancing act of priorities. There is one commonality, however, that all of our members agree upon and that is the

increasing needs of students and communities. The needs have increased exponentially and not in proportion to the funding for programs and services needed to meet demands.

The time that has passed since last year's joint elementary and secondary hearing and today has been especially challenging for building administrators. During that time period, principals continued to respond to catastrophic school violence events and expanding public health issues such as increased use of juul type devices for vaping, an ongoing opioid crisis, and increased access to marijuana. The mental health needs of students and families increase dramatically every year. You will most likely hear a steady drumbeat from many educational and mental health associations regarding the serious nature of these issues. Additionally, education demands have shifted and have required school leaders to again address new initiatives. Since this time last year, ESSA requirements have squarely landed at the door of school administrators, as have new curriculum requirements, additional instructional demands, and new reporting requirements.

Inadequacy of Proposed Foundation Aid

It is within this context that we characterize the Governor's proposed budget state aid package as woefully inadequate. SAANYS is one of the six associations comprising the New York State Educational Conference Board (NYECB) – representing building-level administrators, parents, classroom teachers, superintendents, and school boards – which developed a budget proposal for 2019-20 that calls for a \$2.2 billion dollar state aid increase. The work that went into the development of the ECB proposal was a serious undertaking of experienced and knowledgeable educators. Within the \$2.2 billion increase was a recommended amount of \$400 million for expense-based aids and \$500 million to strengthen student supports.

In the past year the documented number of students receiving free and reduced lunch has increased by 15%, English language learners have increased by 18%, and students with disabilities have increased by 14%. It is estimated that in a classroom of 25 students, five students will present mental health-related symptoms. The Governor's proposal is an unrealistic plan for meeting the needs of the citizens of New York. A proposal that only contains a \$1 billion dollar increase in state aid, in addition to a proposed limitation on expense-based aids in 2020-21 is most problematic. The state has not yet rectified a \$4 billion gap in Foundation Aid due to districts. That fact, coupled with a 2019-20 recommended starting point of a \$2.2 billion increase by the major educational associations, places the Governor's proposal well behind the fair starting line. Additionally, the stated amount of the increased foundation aid is misrepresented. The total funding amount includes funding for community schools aid that is embedded within the proposed total allocation. Community schools funding is not available to all districts and should not be included as part of foundation aid allocations for all district. The community schools aid is a set-aside and cannot be considered as Foundation Aid. Make no mistake, it is a very important set-aside and districts that can avail themselves of the funding are most fortunate. In fact, SAANYS is working with community schools to learn of best practices and disseminate such information across the state. However, embedding the amount within the foundation aid for all schools misrepresents the true allocation, which is far less than the increase stated in the Governor's proposed budget.

Prekindergarten Rollout is Exceedingly Slow

Additional funding in the proposed budget for prekindergarten is welcome, but it remains insufficient. For a program that was intended to be universal prekindergarten in 1999, it has been rolled out abysmally slow. The state's approach to early care and education does not provide a sustainable, nor predictable approach. Despite the national acclaim that NYC has received for its prekindergarten programs, districts in the rest of the state remain painfully left out. Many districts still are not eligible for prekindergarten funding. In fact, New York State does not have a uniform provision of kindergarten and does not require school attendance until age six. This is not acceptable, especially when New York State has added a chronic absenteeism rate as part of each school's accountability measure. School districts are now held accountable for absenteeism starting in grade one. Although the new requirement begins at grade 1, patterns of attendance start far earlier. However, New York State does not have a uniform early education system that provides for statewide prekindergarten or required full-day kindergarten. The lack of consistency across the state is baffling and its effect could result in some districts being identified as low performing for chronic absenteeism because they do not receive funding for prekindergarten.

Funding Needed for Career and Technical Education

The Governor's proposal does not include additional funding for career and technical education. This trend is not consistent with other trends in education. Increasingly, colleges are reducing courses and programs that do result in job securement. With mounting student debt and the troubling outlook for career advancement for many young adults currently in the workplace, students are looking for colleges that offer more specific, job-related programs that result in improved long-term employment. As a college pathway, career and technology education

provides an excellent option. The Board of Regents has expanded multiple pathways for acquiring a Regents diploma and one such option is through a career and technology education program. It is important for New York State to retain and attract young workers. Additional funding is needed to support career and technology programs to support economic expansion in New York.

Updating the Foundation Aid Formula

The Governor has not seemed to fully embrace the foundation aid formula as the structure on which to determine the distribution of state aid to school districts. Under his tenure the formula has been frozen, convolutedly phased in, and modified to include items that ultimately detracted from the formula. As opposed to circumventing the formula, SAANYS is supportive of a call to reexamine the foundation aid formula. Prior to the development of a foundation aid formula, support for schools was determined through often arbitrary processes. The foundation aid formula attempted to establish a predictable basis for distribution of aid based on the costs of a successful school programs and adjusted for regional and student needs. However, much has changed in the ten years since its inception. Increased and evolving student needs, changes in demographics, and requirements to establish budgets while under a tax cap provide an excellent reason for updating the formula used to distribute state aid.

Building-level Reporting

As a result of last year's enacted budget, over 70 districts were required to submit new Transparency Reports delineating anticipated expenditures in federal, state, and local revenue sources. The number of districts required to submit such reports expands to over 300 districts in

the proposed Governor's 2019-20 budget and then extends to all districts in the following school year. Similarly, under ESSA, all districts will be required to report actual expenditures, by building, for local, state, and federal funding sources. These new initiatives have created substantial additional reporting requirements that are burdensome and time-consuming. In his proposed budget the Governor takes his initiative further by now developing quantitative formulas for equity and equity gaps. Any district that is identified as having an equity gap will be required to redistribute funding according to new formulas within the Governor's proposed budget. The Governor's usurping of decisions that are more appropriately made at the local district level is problematic. If enacted this would be an intrusive state policy, not yet situated in substantive data. Data is not yet available on the extent of perceived funding distribution inequities between individual schools within the same district. It is unnecessary at this time to impose a statewide reform process on all districts which may, in fact, end up being a narrower situation. Information gleaned from the transparency reports would be better used to revise the Foundation Aid Formula rather than create another unfunded mandate.

Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPR)

We support the changes to the APPR process included in the Executive Budget proposal as a viable step forward. We remain steadfast in working to ensure that principal evaluations are designed to assess the unique roles of school administrators, that teacher evaluations are designed with administrative input and that the process maximizes district flexibility.

Funding for Administrator Professional Learning

One of the most difficult tasks for school leaders is keeping up with the volume of new requirements and information that will help them improve their own practice. While over \$1.4 million was dedicated to teacher-focused programs in the last state budget, school administrators have not been the beneficiary of such funding. Funding for professional learning is desperately needed for administrators.

The scope of roles and responsibilities of building level administrators has dramatically expanded and shifted over the past five years. Every minute, of every day, is over-scheduled with vitally important student and instructional issues. The following are just a few of the major requirements that have been recently added to a principal's scope and responsibilities:

- School Safety
- New ESSA requirements
- New Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)
- New transparency reports for building-level expenses
- Increased student mental health and socio-emotional needs
- VADIR/DASA reports and data keeping
- New curriculum standards in ELA and Math
- APPR evaluations and associated meetings (for high school administrators this could be over 800 additional meetings).
- New assessments and computer-based testing

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) does not have the capacity to undertake the amount of professional development needed; therefore we strongly urge the

legislature to consider adding \$500,000 for extensive professional learning opportunities for administrators. SAANYS has the capacity to deliver specific and customized professional learning for administrators throughout the state. Our association has provided professional development on critical issues in delivery formats tailored to administrators' schedules. SAANYS has been approved by NYSED as a provider of CTLE credits and has a long and successful record of providing meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for administrators.

Funding for School Districts in Receivership Status

In 2015, Chapter 56 was enacted that required school districts with chronically low performance to be identified as in receivership. With this status came strident requirements intended to turn around student performance in dramatic fashion. These undertakings require fiscal support that has been allocated in the past. The Governor's proposed budget does not include funding for schools new to receivership. If such districts do not receive financial support, then the program must be modified to relieve districts from mandated actions.

Funding needed to offset the probable legalization of adult marijuana

SAANYS is very concerned about the possible legalization of adult use of marijuana on schools. The unintended consequences of such legalization on students and children could be substantial and not fully known at this time. School leaders must prepare for the eventualities of the spillover into schools. It is imperative for the Governor's and legislature consider these eventualities seriously and allocate resources garnered from taxes and fees associate from the

sale of marijuana to educational programs and interventions needed to support the health and mental health of students and staff.

Conclusion

As the state makes great gains on a progressive agenda, the education portion of the Governor's proposed budget presents a rather regressive approach to meeting the actual needs of schools. The message to schools to do much more with much less is not consistent with the Governor's agenda that promotes New York as a progressive state ready to address to social and educational needs of all its citizenry.

The School Administrators Association of New York State therefore recommends:

- \$2.2 billion increase in Foundation Aid.
- Funding for professional learning for administrators.
- Escalated roll out of prekindergarten funding.
- Eliminate proposed formulas that stipulate funding redistribution in districts identified as having equity gaps between schools in the district.
- Funding for educational and mental health-related programs to address the impact of adult use marijuana on students.
- Required attendance in full-day kindergarten.
- Funding for career and technical education.
- Funding for schools newly identified in receivership status.

On behalf of the School Administrators Association of New York State, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on the proposed Executive Budget. Your consideration to our requests and concerns is appreciated. We stand ready to be an active partner in improving the programs and services needed to support the students and schools of New York State.