



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 2019-20 Executive Budget

February 6, 2019

On behalf of New York State School Facilities Association (NYSSFA) and our 600 School Facilities Professional members working in the State's public school districts and BOCES, we are grateful for the opportunity to share our recommendations regarding the 2019-20 Executive Budget and present our 2019 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.

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.

[BUILDING AID](#)

The Executive budget includes a variety of changes to the calculation of building aid. Collectively, these proposals reduced the amount provided in aid for projects. NYSSFA has several concerns regarding these proposals.

NYSSFA is concerned that the effective date, July 1, 2019, will disrupt existing projects which are being planned for the 2019 community vote. These projects have been in a planning process for some time with cost estimates. We are concerned that such a quick implementation date will derail these projects, leading to higher cost estimates and reduced aid.

NYSSFA is also concerned that as school districts shoulder an increasing percentage of capital costs, they will be less likely to have the resources to invest in BOCES capital projects, thereby compounding the challenges BOCES face as a result of the property tax cap.

NYSSFA is concerned that as school districts are required to support more of the building construction costs, investments in maintenance will be reduced. Our members are concerned that if maintenance is not sustained we will be shortening the lifespan of our capital investments.

Finally, NYSSFA is concerned that changes to the allowable incidental expenses will inadvertently prevent aid of projects and services directly related to the initial capital project.

[INCREASE COST THRESHOLD FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS](#)

NYSSFA supports proposals 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 FY2019-2020 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 2019-20 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;

BOCES SUPPORTS

Over the years, the state has been generous in its investment in safety grants, reimbursements, and direct investments in facilities and grounds. Unfortunately, many times BOCES are not eligible for these investments. BOCES's needs are the same, if not greater, than those of our public schools. We rely on BOCES to provide programs to students with disabilities, provide vocational opportunities, and Career and Technical education for the 21st Century jobs.

NYSSFA recommends that you consider BOCES an eligible partner when developing funding opportunities in support of school safety, facilities and grounds.

BOCES CAPITAL PROJECTS

NYSSFA appreciates the Assembly and Senate for passing legislation to resolve the issues with the property tax cap relating to capital expenses within a BOCES budget. NYSSFA is disappointed that Governor Cuomo continues to veto efforts to resolve this issue. 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 addition, with limited resources and competing priorities, Boards of Education are often hesitant to use current year funding on increased maintenance. Finally, there are no minimum maintenance standards or funding levels. As such, many of our structures, equipment, and grounds age faster than necessary.

NYSSFA recommends the creation of an advisory group made up of school facility directors, school administrators, teachers, parents and students, and other stakeholders to develop a rational statewide maintenance policy and investment proposal.

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.