



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 2021-22 Executive Budget

January 28, 2021

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 2021-22 Executive Budget and present our 2021 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.

Our skills and experience as Directors of School Facilities to provide a safe and healthy environment has never been more tested than during the past ten months. COVID-19 has required our immediate and ongoing attention throughout the year.

At the start of the reopening process, our focus was on cleaning, disinfecting and sanitation. As guidance on reopening schools became more specific, our attention turned to classroom configurations, air filtration, and personal protection equipment. As each school has managed varying degrees of in-person, hybrid and remote learning, we have continued to address the health and safety needs of our facilities while managing staffing challenges due to COVID-19.

We are proud that schools are recognized as having lower positivity rates than in the surrounding community. This is, in part, because of the dedication of the men and women who report to work day after day to clean, disinfect and sanitize. As Directors of School Facilities, we are directly involved in the development of our districts' reopening plans and daily implementation. Our staff are essential in ensuring ongoing compliance and responding to the ever-changing environment.

Maintaining a safe and healthy environment is expensive. A year ago, we would never have imagined the need to source the type and amounts of products we are currently consuming. We have been forced to find new vendors and expend more resources in securing the needed equipment to keep in-person instruction possible. We hope that the enacted budget will include funding to support our COVID-19 response as our responsibility has not ended, and we anticipate the need to be diligent well into the 2021-22 school year.

FY 2022 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS

Use of Federal Aid: NYSSFA is concerned that the FY 2022 Executive Budget proposal over relies on Federal Aid to support public schools while reducing the state's financial commitment. NYSSFA understands the State's situation and recognizes the need for Federal support of our State, schools and municipalities. However, without understanding fully how the state will continue its commitment to public schools in the 2022-23 school year absent additional Federal support, NYSSFA encourages the Legislature to explore options for a more stable means of funding public education.

New Services Aid Block Grant: NYSSFA is extremely concerned about the FY 2022 Executive Budget proposal to consolidate certain expense-based aids into a block grant. While pleased Building Aid was not included, the consolidation of other aid categories - such as BOCES Aid and Transportation Aid - will leave school districts with very little ability to control their budgets. Transportation is a mandated service that schools must provide to their students. The shared services of BOCES is inherently a savings that should be encouraged. NYSSFA encourages the legislature to reject the proposal to restrict aid to a fixed block grant

Availability of DASNY: NYSSFA is pleased that the FY 2022 Executive Budget is considering unique ways to assist school districts. Allowing access to DASNY's design, construction and loan services is interesting. It is yet unclear whether these services would be more effective and efficient in the development of school construction projects, and would likely not be beneficial for projects currently in design or construction. More information would be needed to determine if a savings could be realized through DASNY's loan services. Regardless, we are pleased that the Executive Budget seeks to support school construction and this proposal may be of benefit to some.

Transportation Aid: NYSSFA is pleased that the FY 2022 Executive Budget would allow school districts to receive transportation aid for allowable expenses for the period of remote learning during the 2019-20 school year. Allowable expenses would be the transportation of meals, educational materials and supplies, as well as transportation to provide students with internet access. However, the proposal leaves millions of dollars in transportation expenses from 2019-20 unaided. NYSSFA encourages the Legislature to cover the entirety of transportation costs during the pandemic, including costs incurred during the current 2020-21 school year, as districts move to periods of remote learning due to positive COVID-19 cases and quarantine orders.

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.