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Joint Legislative Hearing on the Executive Elementary and Secondary Education Budget

City School District of Albany 2025-26 Legislative Priorities

January 29, 2025

Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to share the funding priorities of the City School District of Albany as we begin the 2025-26 budget-development cycle in earnest.

The State of New York has made significant progress in recent years in delivering fiscal equity for the students, families and taxpayers in high-needs school districts like Albany. In our school district, the fulfilled promise to fully fund Foundation Aid for all New York districts by the 2023-24 school year closed an annual shortfall of more than \$26 million.

As one of New York's urban school districts that for years was under-resourced and, as a result, overly reliant on our taxpayers due to these funding inequities, we were grateful to reach that newly leveled playing field.

We continue to be grateful for the state's commitment to equity, and your recognition of our community's unique needs.

This is reflected in the recommendations brought forward last month by the Rockefeller Institute of Government to retool the state's school funding formula, and in the Executive Budget that Governor Hochul has recently proposed.

In particular, we are heartened by the Rockefeller Institute's recommendations to:

- Modernize poverty measures in the formula,
- Take into account cost-of-living differences across the state,
- Support school districts with large and growing enrollments of English-language learners, and
- Change the formula to remove elements better treated as categorical aids, such as funding for students with disabilities.

(more)

VISION STATEMENT

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

MISSION STATEMENT

We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

We applaud Governor Hochul for reflecting this commitment in her budget proposal, as well as her plan to maintain the important “hold harmless” promise for all school districts.

It is clear that the thoughtful, inclusive process in which the state has engaged has brought New York significantly closer to the fair and equitable school funding formula that every child in our state needs and deserves.

We ask that you to maintain that focus – on funding equity, and on the unique needs of individual school districts and communities – as you plan to support the needs of all New York students next school year.

With these fundamentals in mind, our school district has identified the following priorities for next school year:

Foundation Aid funding and Albany’s unique needs

We ask that you continue to identify and address the unique challenges of individual school districts and communities.

Here in the school district that serves our state’s capital city, those challenges include:

- 63% of our city’s property is tax-exempt
- Nearly one in three children in our city live in poverty
- The oversaturation of charter schools in Albany is among the highest in our state and nation
- Albany is a federally designated resettlement city, a fact in which our city and our school district take great pride.
 - Our enrollment of English-language learners has grown more than 35% just since last year. ELLs comprise more than 20% of our total enrollment.

Equitable prekindergarten funding for high-needs urban school districts

We continue to advocate for funding equity in prekindergarten. This is especially important for high-needs districts like ours, which were early implementers of full-day pre-K but remain hampered by an outdated funding formula.

Support for programs to expand and diversify New York’s teaching workforce

We know you are keenly aware of the ominous statistics for the future of the teaching profession in New York, and we salute the meaningful steps the state has taken to address these looming challenges.

We urge you to continue to develop new pathways that will help break through the barriers that make it difficult for school districts to create and sustain Grow Your Own programs.

Support for social-emotional and mental health services

Finally, we wholeheartedly support the commitment Governor Hochul has made to new programs and services to support students' social-emotional and mental health. This remains a critical need for school districts across New York, and certainly here in Albany.

Thank you.