

Written Testimony of Commissioner Dr. Betty A. Rosa
New York State Education Department Joint Legislative Elementary Education Budget
Hearing

New York State Education Department
Joint Legislative Elementary and Secondary Education Budget Hearing
State Fiscal Year 2026–2027
January 29, 2026

Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Mayer, Liu, and Benedetto, and Members of the Legislature: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents regarding the 2026–2027 Executive Budget and the Board of Regents budget and legislative priorities.

My name is Dr. Betty A. Rosa, and I am New York's Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York. I am joined by members of the NYSED leadership team, Senior Deputy Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey Matteson; Chief Financial Officer Dr. Christina Coughlin; Deputy Commissioner Adult Career and Continuing Education Services, Office of Special Education Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, P-12 Deputy Commissioner Angelique Johnson-Dingle; and Deputy Commissioner and Counsel Daniel Morton-Bentley, senior staff responsible for P-12 education, special education, early learning, fiscal operations, accountability, and school support. I also want to acknowledge Chancellor Lester Young and the members of the Board of Regents for their leadership and steadfast commitment to New York's students, educators, families, and communities.

For more than a century, NYSED has served as the steward of one of the most ambitious and inclusive public education systems in the nation. Our work reaches beyond the classroom: we set standards, administer assessments, support educator development, oversee accountability, safeguard students' rights, and partner with districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to strengthen instruction and support students. We also provide access to New York's cultural heritage through the State Library, State Museum, and State Archives, and we advance workforce readiness for adult learners and individuals with disabilities.

NYSED Workforce Capacity and Civil Service Modernization

None of this work is possible without the dedicated public servants at NYSED who support students, educators, families, and communities across New York every day. In that context, I want to acknowledge the positive impact of the State's Hiring for Emergency Limited Placement Statewide (HELPs) program, which has strengthened our ability to recruit qualified candidates. HELPs allows NYSED and other state agencies to appoint individuals who meet job qualifications irrespective of whether they have taken the applicable Civil Service examination.

Since early 2024, NYSED has appointed 828 individuals into HELPs-eligible positions. The program has significantly expanded applicant pools in mission-critical areas, including Information Technology Services, the Office of State Aid, Rate Setting, and ACCES-VR. For example, NYSED saw a 300 percent increase in applications for entry-level

professional traineeships under HELPS. For the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor title, the Department received over 5,000 applications in 2024 and 2025, compared to 550 applications in 2023, the year before HELPS.

As a result of these and other improvements, NYSED is at its highest full-time staffing level since 2010: 2,829 full-time employees. We continue to manage staffing responsibly through coordination among Human Resources, Fiscal, and Executive leadership.

We are also modernizing our internal hiring operations to reduce time-to-hire and improve candidate experience. This year to date, our Staffing Unit has recruited for 757 positions and classified 132 positions, including new positions authorized in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 budgets. In partnership with our IT team, we have reduced the wait time for appointment information from approximately eight weeks to two to three days following an employee's acceptance. These operational improvements help ensure the Department has the capacity to deliver on its statewide responsibilities.

Civic Readiness and Our Shared History

New York is a rich tapestry of communities, cultures, and histories that we celebrate as we approach our Nation's semisquicentennial. Our State played a defining role in the American Revolution and in the ongoing, unfinished work of democracy that followed: the struggle to ensure that all people, all New Yorkers, have meaningful access to the lofty rights and ideals that define our nation. The history of the State Education Department is also intertwined in the founding of our nation and growth as a state. Indeed, two of the first members of the Board of Regents, founded in 1784, included both Alexander Hamilton and John Jay.

The legislative and budget priorities of the Board of Regents and NYSED build upon this important work. Education is the foundation for ensuring that future generations understand our shared history and its lessons. New York has long served as a catalyst for expanding democracy—from the Seneca Falls Convention and the women's suffrage movement, to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the advancement of labor rights and dignity at work, to our State's continued leadership in advancing equity, dignity, and safety for LGBTQAI+ New Yorkers.

New York Inspires is central to this work. NY Inspires builds and expands upon the original goals of the Graduation Measures initiative. These goals represent a statewide blueprint to ensure students graduate prepared not only for college and careers, but also for civic life in a rapidly evolving economy and democracy. NY Inspires expands meaningful, rigorous ways for students to demonstrate what they know and can do, with State guardrails to ensure comparability, consistency, and fairness. A single exam should not determine whether a student graduates. We ask for your support in helping districts show us all the different ways that students learn and succeed.

Executive Budget Investments We Appreciate and Acknowledge

The Executive Budget includes several important investments that align with Regents' priorities and strengthen educational opportunities across the State:

Early Childhood Education and Childcare Expansion

We appreciate the Governor's major early childhood and childcare proposals, which move New York closer to the Regents long-term goal of making high-quality prekindergarten truly universal.

The Regents have long advocated for policies that strengthen access to early learning. The commitment in the Executive Budget to support early childhood staffing capacity, including positions in our fiscal and State Aid offices, is pivotal to supporting this work. NYSED looks forward to working with the Legislature, OCFS, districts, and community-based organizations to ensure UPK expansion is high-quality, equitable, and sustainable.

Statewide Longitudinal Data System

We also support building a Statewide Longitudinal Data System as outlined in the Executive Budget. This work is a cross-agency collaboration that utilizes existing data sets to identify opportunities for all New Yorkers to thrive, while maintaining strong protections for student data privacy. The addition of five positions will help NYSED modernize data infrastructure, improve the timeliness and quality of reporting, and reduce administrative burdens on districts through more efficient and secure data workflows. This capacity will also support NY Inspires implementation by strengthening our ability to monitor outcomes, identify equity gaps, and provide actionable information to districts and BOCES. We are grateful for the support of the Governor's Office in advancing this initiative.

Cultural Education: Stabilizing the Office of Cultural Education

The Executive Budget's fund realignment provides short-term stability necessary for the Office of Cultural Education to operate. This investment ensures continuity for the State Museum, State Library, and State Archives while maintaining existing programs and public access statewide. It also helps ensure access to the cultural resources that support civic learning and community identity.

At the same time, NYSED and the Board of Regents remain committed to working collaboratively with the Legislature and the Executive to advance a long-term funding approach. A more stable and transparent funding structure would support responsible planning and staffing, strengthen preservation and conservation efforts, and reinforce the long-term stewardship of New York's cultural and historical resources for generations to come.

Special Education Reimbursement and Core Service Continuity

The Executive Budget maintains critical special education reimbursement-based aid and other core commitments that enable districts to meet mandated services for students with disabilities.

Indigenous Education and Civics

The Executive Budget includes \$864,000 to develop and expand civics instruction for Indigenous youth. This investment aligns with our government-to-government relationships with the Indigenous Nations and supports civic readiness and culturally grounded learning for all students.

The Executive Budget also builds upon a previous investment in last year's budget by allocating \$500,000 in additional support for Indigenous education curricular resources. These resources are designed to uplift and deepen the voice of Indigenous educators and provide tools and resources for districts across New York to teach about, and incorporate, Indigenous perspectives.

Accelerated Teacher Preparation

New York is facing a teacher shortage across the state; we need new, innovative ways to attract prospective teachers into the profession and diversify the workforce. The Executive Budget includes \$2 million to support the development of accelerated teacher preparation pathway programs that can help address this shortage. This funding also bolsters NYSED's plan to propose regulations to the Board of Regents to establish a new practice-based preparation pathway designed for teaching assistants, professionals in related fields, and college graduates who are interested in teaching.

We express our gratitude and support for each of the above Executive proposals. However, **several Regents priorities that are central to equity and to successful implementation of NY Inspires were not addressed, or not fully met**, in the Executive proposal. These investments represent the supports districts are counting on to sustain essential services while meeting new and evolving obligations for all students.

The following are the Regents and NYSED priorities we ask the Legislature to consider:

1) NY Inspires and Graduation Measures Implementation Capacity (\$5.1 million)

New York's graduation requirements have remained largely unchanged, even as the world our students are preparing to enter has fundamentally transformed. The Regents' Blue Ribbon Commission process made clear that students must graduate with the skills that drive success in college, careers, and civic life: critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, and citizenship.

NY Inspires is New York's blueprint to modernize graduation expectations and the learning experiences that lead to a diploma. It does not reduce rigor or lower standards. Rather, it allows students and educators to deepen instruction and create enduring connections between the classroom, career, and college. It improves relevance and the authenticity of learning, while maintaining statewide guardrails for consistency and equity.

However, NY Inspires cannot be implemented effectively through local effort alone. The Regents request \$5.1 million in implementation capacity to ensure New York's updated graduation expectations are implemented equitably, consistently, and sustainably across the state. Without this support, districts will be left to build new systems independently, which will create inconsistent results and inequity for students.

This funding would enable the Department to provide:

- **Clear statewide guidance and expectations**, including timelines and implementation frameworks;
- **Technical assistance and capacity-building** for districts and BOCES;
- **Tools and exemplars** for high-quality, performance-based learning and assessment systems; and
- **Professional learning** to support instructional and assessment shifts so implementation is consistent across regions.

Most importantly, this investment translates directly into improved student experiences and outcomes, including:

- **More engaging, relevant instruction** connected to meaningful learning;
- **Authentic assessments** aligned to real-world skills; and
- **Multiple, rigorous ways for students to demonstrate mastery** while maintaining statewide guardrails for fairness and comparability.

While the Executive Budget includes some additional State operations funding for the Department, it does not provide the local assistance support for professional learning and field implementation needed to bring NY Inspires to life.

2) Early Childhood: Alignment and Implementation Supports

The Executive Budget proposes significant early childhood and childcare investments, including substantial increases in universal prekindergarten aid with a goal toward universal access. These proposals align with the Board of Regents' long-standing goal of making high-quality prekindergarten available to all children and strengthening early learning as a foundational component of student success.

As this expansion is implemented, the systems supporting it must remain durable and high-quality. For that reason, the Regents and NYSED respectfully ask the Legislature to continue to partner with NYSED and our partners in state government on the conditions necessary for successful implementation, including:

- Coherent expectations and requirements across agencies and delivery models, while ensuring that universal prekindergarten remains fully aligned with P–20 learning standards, instructional expectations, educator certification, and accountability systems administered by NYSED;

- Workforce stability, including recruitment, retention, and consistent credential pathways that support early childhood educators as an integral part of the educator workforce;
- Sustainable collaboration between school districts and community-based organizations, with clearly defined roles, funding expectations, and commitment to program quality;
- Targeted implementation supports to ensure expansion is equitable, particularly in high-need districts and communities with limited early childhood infrastructure; and
- Strong instructional coherence and program quality, so that increased access translates into improved outcomes for children and effective transition into the K–12 system.

3) CTE Parity for Non-BOCES Component Districts (\$10.1 million)

Career and Technical Education is one of the most effective strategies for increasing engagement, strengthening attendance and persistence, and connecting learning to future opportunity. NY Inspires elevates career-connected learning and real-world application as essential components of readiness.

Yet students' access to high-quality CTE differs based on governance structures and regional service models. The Regents recommend **\$10.1 million** to maintain parity of access for students in districts that are not BOCES components (i.e., the Big 5 City School Districts).

This investment is necessary to ensure that career-connected learning is not dependent on geography, structure, or zip code. Therefore, we ask the Legislature to consider funding this priority, which is not included in the Executive Budget.

4) Shared Services Innovation Fund (\$10 million)

NY Inspires will succeed at scale when districts and BOCES can collaborate to design and expand high-quality models, reduce duplication, and share capacity.

The Regents request **\$10 million** for a Shared Services Innovation Fund to support regionally-developed, NY Inspires-aligned shared projects. This fund is designed to:

- Provide start-up capacity for cross-district projects;
- Support exemplar programs that can be replicated in other regions;
- Strengthen local and regional networks of support opportunities and capacity building to facilitate project-based learning and career-connected pathways; and
- Reduce barriers to collaboration by supporting planning, development, and early implementation costs.

Absent this investment, districts will continue to face capacity constraints; the Executive Budget does not include this funding.

5) Foundation Aid Level and Formula Enhancements Aligned to Student Need

State School Aid is the backbone of equitable public education in New York, especially for underserved communities. The Regents State Aid proposal calls for a \$1.1 billion increase for 2026–2027 and includes targeted formula enhancements designed to better reflect student need

and local capacity. The Executive proposal calls for a \$779 million increase in Foundation Aid, including a minimum growth of 1 percent for each district. We appreciate the inclusion of a minimum increase and the shared commitment to educational excellence. However, the Regents approach would provide more differentiated increases based on student need and fiscal capacity, with some high-need districts receiving greater increases (up to approximately 2 percent) with lower-need districts receiving less.

Based on extensive conversations I have had, school districts across the State support the Regents proposal. Even with a minimum increase, the Executive proposal will not keep pace with the rising costs districts are facing, and it is not sufficiently targeted to need. For example, this year, the Windsor Central School District's employee health care premiums increased by approximately 17.5 percent. That is a concrete illustration of the cost pressures districts are confronting as they work to recruit and retain the best educators and staff for our students at a pivotal moment for our State.

In addition to the overall level of Foundation Aid, the Regents also support targeted formula adjustments that strengthen equity and stability in multiple formulas, including:

- Improved recognition of English Language Learner needs;
- New funding tied to students experiencing homelessness; and
- Growth in career and technical education funding for districts that are not BOCES components, to keep pace with growth in BOCES aid.

The Executive Budget does not include the Regents-requested formula enhancements. The Regents' request was not fully met in the Executive Budget proposal.

6) Special Education: Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education Through Age 22 (\$65.5 million projected State Aid impact)

NYSED recommends that New York State law be amended to align with districts' obligation to provide a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities up to age 22, including updating State Aid funding for these programs and services.

Legal and administrative guidance over the past two years has clarified districts' responsibility to serve eligible students through the day before their 22nd birthday if they have not earned a diploma, consistent with federal requirements and court decisions. NYSED has reaffirmed this obligation and made clear that noncompliance will be treated as willful under Education Law.

However, State Aid statutes do not align with this obligation. Current law largely limits eligibility to age 21, which means districts are now absorbing substantial new costs without State support. The Regents' State Aid proposal recommends statutory changes to align State Aid eligibility with this requirement, with a projected State Aid impact of \$74.4 million in the 2026-2027 school year, recognizing that this is only an estimate.

From a State fiscal perspective, this will largely result in a shifting of costs, as most students with disabilities aged 21 and 22 are served in residential settings overseen by the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). However, this alignment is necessary to ensure that districts can meet legal obligations and that students receive required services. Furthermore, by not funding a free appropriate public education through age 22, the state is effectively shifting the cost of serving these students directly to districts.

The Executive Budget does not include the statutory and fiscal alignment required to support this obligation.

7) Teacher Pipeline: Teach.org Continuation (\$1.3 million)

NY Inspires depends on the educators who bring learning to life. Teacher shortages and pipeline constraints reduce course offerings, limit student supports, and strain districts' ability to offer rich learning experiences.

Teach.org has partnered with the Department to create a state-customized teacher recruitment system, including the Teach NY website. The website has been successful, with more than 82,000 sign-ups (64 percent identified themselves as people of color) since the website launched in April 2024. Additionally, the website has helped facilitate more than 1,400 one-on-one advising sessions and 4,200 group advising registrations for aspiring teachers. We are happy to see that the Executive Budget includes \$500,000 for Teach.org. This is a constructive step that helps sustain a statewide recruitment platform and conduct outreach to support prospective educators in entering the profession.

The Regents and NYSED request \$1.3 million to continue the relationship with Teach.org and maintain the scope of work that districts and aspiring educators rely on. This request is distinct from broader teacher pipeline investments because it supports a specific statewide recruitment and navigation tool that helps convert interest into commitment.

In addition to these initiatives, over the past several years, the Department has advanced a consistent set of regulatory and policy reforms to address educator workforce needs statewide. These reforms are designed to streamline certification, remove barriers unrelated to educator quality, and strengthen practical, high-quality pathways into the profession.

Key actions to date include:

- **Strengthening the Teaching Assistant-to-teacher pathway:** The Department overhauled Teaching Assistant certification requirements to simplify the process and intentionally align TA requirements with the requirements for an Initial teacher certificate, reinforcing a local “Grow Your Own” pipeline.
- **Expanding flexibility for already-certified educators:** The Department reduced the additional content-area coursework required for certified teachers to earn an additional certificate from 30 credit hours to 18 semester hours. This change is particularly relevant for hard-to-staff areas, including certain secondary science fields.

- **Improving pathways for out-of-state candidates:** The Department replaced “equivalent” with “comparable” as the standard for assessing out-of-state certification. The Department also indicated that it would accept a broader range of exams that the Department determines are appropriate (including national Praxis and Pearson examinations) in assessing these candidates.
- **Creating alternative pathways for candidates who do not initially pass certification exams:** The Department established new options for meeting exam requirements for candidates who take an exam but do not obtain a passing score, including a 3.5 GPA pathway and a portfolio assessment option that evaluates a candidate’s depth of knowledge. Since the GPA pathway was launched in September, more than 3,000 candidates have achieved certification through this route. The Department is also launching the first set of portfolio assessments at the end of this month in collaboration with a testing vendor, Pearson.
- **Improving candidate preparation and first-time pass outcomes:** The Department has implemented a new support platform developed by Pearson, Right Start, to provide customized online guidance to help candidates prepare effectively and reduce testing barriers.

Looking ahead, the Department has additional work underway that will further modernize and strengthen the pipeline:

- **Reimagining Transitional certificates:** This spring, the Department will propose regulatory amendments to streamline Transitional teaching and administrator certificate pathways, making the system easier for candidates and employers to navigate.
- **Launching a new practice-based preparation pathway:** The Department will also establish a new Transitional certificate option, a practice-based program pathway, enabling local educational agencies and educator preparation programs to co-design competency-based preparation that integrates structured learning with robust school-based clinical experiences. These programs would not be degree programs and would not require a minimum number of graduate credits; instead, candidates would be required to demonstrate competencies that ensure they are classroom-ready. This pathway is expected to be particularly attractive for those changing careers and for experienced school-based staff such as Teaching Assistants, while also supporting the State’s goal of diversifying the educator workforce through a lower-cost, high-quality entry option.
- **Increasing transparency through workforce and EPP dashboards:** The Department is preparing to launch new Educator Preparation Program and Teacher Workforce dashboards that will provide timely, on-demand information about the pipeline, including EPP enrollment and completion trends, local workforce needs, and the relationship between program outputs and field demand. The intent is to support local and regional partnerships between LEAs and EPPs, strengthen policy evaluation, and inform future investments in high-leverage workforce strategies.

8) College in High School Expansion and P-TEACH (+\$10.9 million to reach \$20 million total; \$5.0 million P-TEACH)

Dual enrollment can improve student outcomes and reduce college costs. It can also strengthen students' confidence and post-secondary momentum, particularly for first-generation college students and students in communities where college-going pathways require additional support.

The Regents' request is to increase College in High School program funding by an additional **\$10.9 million**, bringing the program to a **total of \$20 million**. The Regents also recommend creation of a **\$5.0 million P-TEACH program** to address chronic teacher shortages and strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline.

Both investments advance NY Inspires by expanding meaningful pathways, accelerating opportunity, and connecting learning to real futures.

Although the Executive Budget includes \$9.1 million for the College in High School program and \$2 million for P-TEACH, the full amounts of the Regents' requested funding are not included in the Executive proposal. Additionally, the Executive Budget does not reappropriate prior-year funding or provide new funding for Smart Scholars Early College High School, Smart Transfer Early College High School, and traditional New York State P-TECH programs for the 2026–2027 school year, representing a significant change from past Enacted Budgets.

9) Cultural Education and Summer School for the Arts (+\$800,000)

Arts education supports creativity, communication, identity, and belonging. These are not extracurricular skills. They are essential to civic life and to the deeper learning NY Inspires elevates.

The Regents request an \$800,000 increase for New York State Summer School for the Arts (NYSSSA) to expand access and opportunity for students across the State. NYSED will also be convening a NYSSSA Visioning Task Force to guide a reimagining and planning process. The coming year will serve as a planning year, during which the NYSSSA residential program will not operate, to ensure that the program's future model aligns fully with statutory requirements and reflects best practices for high-quality, safe, and inclusive arts programming.

We recognize the deep significance NYSSSA holds for alumni, families, and the broader arts community. That legacy—and the program's impact on generations of young New Yorkers—is central to this work. The Task Force will engage educators, artists, and stakeholders from across the state, and its recommendations will inform NYSED's long-term strategy for restoring and strengthening NYSSSA.

The Executive proposal does not provide funding for this request.

10) Libraries are Community Anchors

While we appreciate continued support for libraries and library construction, the Executive budget reduces library aid and library construction aid from current enacted budget levels.

Libraries are essential civic infrastructure. They provide broadband access, workforce and career supports, English language learning resources, services for new Americans, and safe, trusted community spaces. In many communities, the library is the front door to opportunity and the most accessible civic institution. We request, at minimum, maintenance of existing levels of library aid and library construction aid.

11) Full Regents Capital Package, Including the St. Regis Mohawk Nation School (Regents capital proposal: \$227.3 million; St. Regis ask: approximately \$115 million)

State-owned and state-supported schools serving some of New York's most vulnerable students face urgent infrastructure challenges. The Regents capital request totals \$227.3 million for time-sensitive projects to protect students and staff, preserve assets, and reduce long-term costs.

We thank the Executive for recognizing urgent capital needs in these State facilities. For example, the Executive Budget includes the Department's \$18.2 million request to repair damage and address critical issues at the NYSED building at 89 Washington Avenue. Completed in October 1912, this treasured building is a landmark for Albany and for the entire State. This investment will help ensure it remains a beacon of learning and opportunity for generations to come.

Within the Regents capital package, we also want to highlight a critical safety and equity priority: the St. Regis Mohawk Nation School at Akwesasne. NYSED and the Regents have requested approximately \$115 million, in partnership with the Office of General Services, to design and construct a new school, as the existing facility is located on a flood plain and has experienced flooding in recent years. We also appreciate that the Executive Budget includes \$20.099 million in support for the three Indigenous Nation schools—and that multiple reappropriations have been amended to allow funds to be used for the design and construction of a new school at Akwesasne, representing an important step forward. At the same time, the scale of need at St. Regis remains significant. A new school is both a matter of safety and equity. St. Regis Mohawk students deserve a modern learning environment that supports Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and provides the conditions for students to learn, grow, and thrive. NYSED has been working closely with the St. Regis Mohawk Nation Council as part of our ongoing government-to-government engagement.

While the Executive Budget takes meaningful steps in the right direction, the Regents capital request was not fully met, and additional investment is needed to ensure equity and safe, supportive learning environments for all students served in State-owned and State-supported schools.

Conclusion

The Board of Regents and NYSED are committed to the principle that all means all. That is the foundation of NY Inspires, and it is the promise our education system must deliver.

We appreciate the Executive Budget investments that move New York forward, in early childhood, in addressing Office of Cultural Education stabilization, and core supports for school districts. At the same time, the Regents priorities not fully met in the Executive proposal are the investments and statutory alignments that will determine whether NY Inspires can be implemented statewide with rigor, consistency, and equity.

We respectfully request your partnership to:

- **Invest in NY Inspires/Graduation Measures implementation capacity;**
- **Ensure Foundation Aid formula enhancements better reflect student need;**
- **Expand equitable access to CTE and high-quality pathways;**
- **Align State Aid with the obligation to provide FAPE through age 22;**
- **Strengthen teacher recruitment and preparation through Teach.org and P-TEACH;**
- **Expand dual enrollment through College in High School programs;**
- **Provide needed funding increase to our local libraries and library systems; and**
- **Meet urgent capital needs, including the new St. Regis Mohawk Nation School.**

Thank you for your time and your partnership.