

Dr. Christopher M. Spence

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

cspence@uticaschools.org www.uticaschools.org

P] (315) 792-2222 F] (315) 792-2200



UTICA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT / 929 YORK STREET / UTICA, NY 13502

To: Honorable Members of the New York State Legislature

From: Dr. Christopher Spence, Superintendent of Schools, Utica City School District

Date: January 29, 2026

Re: Testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing on the Executive Elementary and Secondary Education Budget

Thank you for this opportunity to share specific budget and policy issues related to the Governor's Budget, as well as, the funding priorities of the Utica City School District. The Utica City School District is highly dependent on State Aid. It is expected for 2026-2027 that approximately 83.4% of our general fund budget will be supported by NYS with 9.6% in local property taxes. This limits the district's opportunity to raise revenue to support escalating costs associated with contractual obligations and benefits to support students. Foundation Aid accounts for over 70% of our State Aid package which previously was provided to districts to pay for any and all expenses as the district deemed necessary to support student learning in the community served.

Relating to several initiatives noted in the Governor's 2027 Budget Proposal:

1. **Back to Basics in Math** – It is estimated that the Utica City School District would need to significantly increase the number of reading and math specialists in our schools to close the achievement gap. For SY 2025, the Utica City School District added one math interventionist to each elementary school. The district would need to deploy at least five additional math interventionists in each of ten elementary schools to close the achievement gap for math in Utica.
2. **High Impact Tutoring** – Home and school district-based tutoring is extensively utilized by the district for its neediest students and additional funding, as proposed, would greatly benefit our District's students.
3. **Teacher Pipeline Support** – Like most school districts around the State, the Utica City School District is struggling to recruit, hire and retain qualified teachers. Any support to be provided by the State would be greatly appreciated.

Additionally, highlights unique to the funding need of our District include:

1. **Career and Technical Education** – In 2026, the district will have it's first class within it's new Career and Technical Educational Program that complements what is currently being offered by our regional BOCES and is projected to serve 100 students per 12 pathways

for a total enrollment of 1,200 students. The programming and pathways are the result of the recommendations of a district lead Blue-Ribbon Task Force consisting of over 120 partners from business, industry and post-secondary institutions. This new program is directly aligned with the NYS Education Department's new graduation measures initiative. Leveraging the aid is essential to ensure sustainability for this program into perpetuity as it relates to legacy costs for administration, faculty and equipment.

2. **Raiders Extended Day (RED) Afterschool Program Expansion** – In 2025, the district created an award winning after-school program that provides academic enrichment and social emotional learning opportunities for approximately 675 students. Due to the program's success and student interest, the district expanded to 1,000 students in the 2025-2026 school year and the district has set an objective to enroll 1,300 students in the 2026-2027 school year.
3. **Special Education** – The district has recognized a steady increase in students with high levels of academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs at much younger ages. The district has initiated and opened multiple new classrooms for students and hired additional support personnel to better meet the special needs of these students.
4. **English Language Learners** – Nearly 20% of our student population is comprised of English Language Learners with over fifty (50) languages spoken. The current staffing is not adequate to meet the needs of these students, including a qualified director of programming for those students and additional funding is needed to expand its Spanish Bilingual programming at the elementary level.