

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Testimony
Elementary Education/Secondary Education**

January 29, 2026

Hello, my name is Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, and I am the Executive Director of EdTrust–New York. Ed Trust–New York is a statewide policy and advocacy organization that seeks to close opportunity gaps that keep too many students from reaching their full potential, especially students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx students, and those from low-income backgrounds. Our work is data-driven and student-centered, and we work in partnership with civil rights, education, parents, nonprofit and business organizations across the State.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony with members of this committee as you consider the 2026-2027 State Budget. As an organization committed to pursuing equity in education, our work focuses on ensuring policies, structures, and systems exist so that all children are equipped with the skills and resources necessary to be successful in whatever paths they may choose for college or career and beyond.

EdTrust-New York's 2026 policy agenda is premised on the belief that all children can succeed in school when provided with high-quality, culturally relevant instruction and support that is equity-driven, data-centered, and student-focused. To improve outcomes across the state for students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx, and students from low-income backgrounds, EdTrust-New York advocates for an equitable system of education that helps schools meet the following milestones:

1. Every child is ready for kindergarten success;
2. Every student has the foundational skills necessary to be proficient in reading by the end of 3rd grade, and proficient in math by 8th grade, while receiving science of learning-based instruction from an effective, diverse educator workforce;
3. Every student has access to advanced coursework, college in high school opportunities, and a meaningful diploma that signifies they are prepared for college and career;
4. Every child is part of an equitable system of funding and support that targets resources to the districts and schools that need it the most, monitors student progress, and collects data to track student outcomes from cradle to career;
5. Every high school graduate is provided with the information, support, and financial aid needed to enroll in and complete college or postsecondary training and;
6. Every student has access to a safe and welcoming school environment that prioritizes the social and emotional well-being of students, including multilingual learners and immigrant students.

Executive Budget proposal

The Governor's 2026-27 Executive Budget includes several important steps that address these milestones and EdTrust-New York supports the inclusion of the following proposals in the Legislature's final enacted budget:

Math: EdTrust-New York applauds the Governor's Back to Basics in Math initiative, which supports professional learning, evidence-based instruction, high-quality instructional materials, and a new micro-credential in math for educators. **We urge the Legislature to include the Governor's \$6 million proposal for math, a foundational skill essential to future student success, in the final budget.**

Literacy: EdTrust-New York appreciates the Governor's leadership on literacy and **urges the Legislature to include her proposals to invest \$4.5 million** in science of reading micro-credentials for current educators (\$3m) and a pilot program supporting reading instruction in the Rochester and Yonkers school districts, in partnership with local educator preparation programs (\$1.5m).

High-Impact Tutoring: EdTrust-New York supports the Governor's proposal to provide high-impact tutoring in math and reading at high-needs schools. High-impact tutoring is a proven strategy for improving student outcomes in these foundational skills, and **we urge the Legislature to include \$9 million in the final budget.**

Educator Recruitment and Pipeline: EdTrust-New York welcomes the Executive Budget proposal to develop and retain an effective and diverse teaching workforce, including the creation of alternative teacher preparation pathways, expansion of P-TEACH, and the establishment of a new task force on teacher shortages. **We urge the Legislature to include \$4 million for these programs in the final budget.**

Executive Budget Concerns

EdTrust-New York is disappointed that the Governor's budget proposal does not provide a more comprehensive multi-year investment in literacy or provide funding to support universal FAFSA completion.

Additionally, we are concerned that the Executive Budget's does not make any additional changes to the Foundation Aid formula. We look forward to working with the Governor's office and the legislature to more comprehensively address changes to the Foundation Aid formula and ensure educational equity.

Legislative Budget Request

We believe the Legislature has an important opportunity to build on the Executive Budget proposal and improve the lives of all New York students and educators by investing in the following K-12 priorities:

Literacy

The 2024 Back to Basics initiative was an important first step in ensuring that all students and educators are provided with instruction and training aligned with the science of reading. However, much more needs to be done to support students and educators to improve reading outcomes across the state. Despite the highest per-pupil spending in the nation, New York ranked 23rd in fourth grade reading on the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and less than half of Black and Latinx third graders scored proficient on the 2024-25 New York State ELA assessment. State leaders must respond to these unsatisfactory outcomes by approaching literacy as a multi-year, phased-in investment that ensures schools align instruction and professional learning with the science of reading. For this year's budget, we urge support for the following:

- **Professional Learning:** While we appreciate the Governor's \$3 million investment in science of reading micro credentials, more support is needed. Many current educators lack training in the science of reading from their preparation programs and require professional learning and coaching aligned to the science of reading to support classroom instruction and help meet the state's new literacy requirements. We propose an additional \$17 million in grants to districts to ensure all K-12 educators are provided with the opportunity to receive a micro credential in the science of reading and/or job-embedded coaching to improve classroom practice.
- **Universal Reading Screening:** New York is one of nine states that does not require universal reading screening in grades K-3 and one of twelve that does not mandate screening for Dyslexia. Early screening is critical to identifying reading challenges early, informing instruction, and providing targeted support to students. We propose a \$10 million investment that would require districts to screen all K-3 students three times per year using an evidence-based screener that includes Dyslexia identification, along with training and support for educators.
- **Curricula Aligned with the Science of Reading:** Recent analysis of district curriculum use shows that many are still using non-evidence based instructional resources. We propose a \$15 million investment to provide grants to districts not using curriculum aligned to the science of reading, for the purchase of evidence-based K-5 literacy curricula and instructional resources.
- **Support for the Center for Dyslexia and Dysgraphia:** The Center was recently signed into law and will play a critical role in supporting students with dyslexia and dysgraphia across the state. We propose a \$2 million investment to support staffing and implementation of the Center's work.

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

We appreciate the Governor's continued support for the development of a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). We will be proposing legislation to establish a multi-agency governance board to securely track student outcomes and improve evidence-based policy making. We also urge the Legislature to invest an additional \$2 million in community and

stakeholder engagement to ensure the system reflects the needs of teachers, parents, students, and practitioners.

Universal FAFSA Completion

EdTrust-New York calls on the Legislature to invest \$3 million to enhance community outreach to students and support the New York State Education Department in monitoring the implementation of the Universal FAFSA completion law.

Math

While we appreciate the Governor's Back to Basics Math initiative, educators will need additional support to implement high-quality instruction across the state. States have successfully addressed poor math outcomes by providing math coaches to support high quality instruction in the classroom, with a focus on high-need districts. We propose an initial state investment of \$20 million to provide a qualified math coach for up to 200 high-need elementary schools across the state.

NYInspires/Graduation Measures

EdTrust-New York supports the New York State Education Department's request for \$5.1 million to implement NYInspires graduation measures, with a focus on technical assistance for districts and professional learning for educators. We emphasize that the state must implement these changes with strong safeguards to maintain equity and rigor for all students, particularly students of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

College in High School

We also support NYSED's request for \$10.9 million to expand College in Highschool programming, allowing more students to benefit from last year's policy changes to this important program.

Foundation Aid Formula

We continue to advocate for full funding of the Foundation Aid formula and for targeted improvements, including:

- Increasing the SAIPE Poverty Weight to better support students experiencing extreme poverty.
- Scaling the SAIPE Poverty Weight to address the heightened needs of students living in concentrated poverty.
- Passing legislation to improve data collection and transparency requiring the annual collection and public reporting of disaggregated data on how districts and schools spend Foundation Aid funds.

FAFSA completion

In 2024, New York took a major step forward to improving FAFSA completion rates by passing a Universal FAFSA law last year. To meet the new Universal FAFSA completion requirements,

districts and community partners need significant support to increase outreach and meet the law's requirements and **we propose a \$3 million new investment that would support outreach to students and funding to NYSED to meaningfully collect data on the law's implementation, particularly around student waivers.**

Educator Workforce and Diversity

While we appreciate the Governor's proposed investments in recruiting and retaining a qualified and diverse educator workforce, we support additional strategies to achieve this critical goal, including:

- **Grow and Keep Your Own Fund:** We propose \$32 million for a Grow and Keep Your Own Fund that allocates resources to support apprenticeships, residencies, and other retention and recruitment initiatives that will diversify the educator workforce in key shortage areas and high-need regions. This fund would cover the costs of supporting 200 apprentices per year to support teacher recruitment, and 800 stipends for retention efforts including in-service certification and leadership advancement, mentoring and coaching for teaching, salary bonuses and supports for in-service educators in shortage subject areas and high-need districts.
- **Educator Preparation Innovation Consortium:** To lead the way in designing, testing, and advancing rigorous, future-ready, competency-based teacher preparation and assessment models, we propose \$600K to launch an Educator Preparation Consortium. These funds would cover an annual summit and consortium-wide professional development series, technology costs for collaboration and data sharing, technical assistance contracts, and evaluation costs for generating and disseminating evidence.

I want to thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before you today and offer strategies to further educational equity for students throughout New York. We appreciate the Executive's and Legislature's leadership on these critical issues and look forward to continuing to work together for New York's students and our collective future.