



Westchester Assembly Delegation Budget Forum

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The Westchester Putnam School Boards Association greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide you with testimony on issues regarding public education. We are aware and truly appreciative of all your support and understanding of the issues that face public school districts.

Advance Student Success

We greatly appreciate the Governor's proposal to increase the per pupil rate for Universal Pre-Kindergarten Aid to match the current New York City rate for Statewide Universal Full-Day Pre-Kindergarten (SUFDPK). The ability of school districts in our region to provide additional seats for 4-year-olds depends greatly on these funds. Currently, regional districts are only providing 50% of what New York State targets to reach universal status. In fact, fourteen Westchester districts have not been able to access any of their stated UPK aid to date. The need to double seats and create new programs will require a substantial effort in only two years. Discussions about implementation challenges are ongoing.

We continue to push for additional review of the broken Foundation Aid formula. A reasonable start is to look at the district level effects of the Rockefeller Institute study. Further study is clearly required – particularly on an appropriate base Foundation amount, a potentially separate special education aid stream, and the impact of the property tax levy cap on a community's "ability to pay" in the formula. In the meantime, as 70% of districts in Westchester and Putnam counties are currently not on formula (similar to state numbers), a minimum aid increase of only 1% is clearly inadequate to cover even inflationary costs. Common sense adjustments to the property tax cap are critically important. With the tax levy cap base number limited to 2% and aid increases of only 1%, schools will have a difficult time paying for any cost increases in the coming year, let alone the continuing double-digit increases in health care expenses.

As our funding is limited, we implore you to ensure that public tax dollars do not fund private and charter schools in our region. The voucher program offered by the federal government has the potential to reduce public school enrollment, and help pay for students already attending private schools, instead of ensuring equitable distribution of funding and support of public education available to all. In Westchester County, we are also concerned that the addition of more charter schools to our already small districts will have a significant negative fiscal impact on the current schools. Despite that, if communities truly wish for a charter school option, we support a



requirement that any new or expanded charter school must be approved, in part, by a vote of the local community. As public school budgets are approved by taxpayers and voters in our communities, so should the addition of a charter school option that will be paid for through those same taxpayer funds.

Support for our students in the short term also includes the need for school aid funding for special education students through age 22, as districts are already serving students for an additional year (beyond age 21) with no additional state funding. The Special Act School districts, many of which are located in Westchester County, are looking for your support in codifying recent improvements in the tuition methodology and requiring agencies co-located with the schools to share critical student information on a real-time basis to ensure that the agency and school district work together to best support these challenged students.

Strengthen School Systems

School district funds, transportation operations and electric grid capacity are all insufficient to support the proposed implementation timing of New York State's mandate on zero-emission buses. We ask you to support a delay in the requirement to only purchase and then fully utilize electric school buses.

As funding is clearly in short supply, we are asking for your help in simplifying the regulatory and legislative requirements that public school districts operate under, including improved hiring and retention through further modernization of the civil service hiring process and ensuring that teacher certification and assignment flexibility is available to school districts. Granting districts full ownership over the design of their school calendar, including starting and ending dates, will make it easier to ensure calendars are devised with the needs of our local communities front and center. Finally, permit a simplification of school trustee election requirement to eliminate the second petitioning period if a candidate drops out. When the list of candidates for the ballot is not finalized until seven days before the election, military ballots are invalidated, printing ballots is made difficult on a short time frame, and most importantly, community members do not have the opportunity to learn about all of the candidates they can vote onto their local board of education.



Thank you for your ongoing support of public education in Westchester County, and all you do to assist educators in public school districts in providing academic, extracurricular, social, and mental health programs and services to the young people of our state.