

WPSBA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT 2026

PROTECTING & CHAMPIONING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Protecting New
York's public schools
starts at the roots!

2025–26 Advocacy Priorities

Sustain the
foundations of
public education.



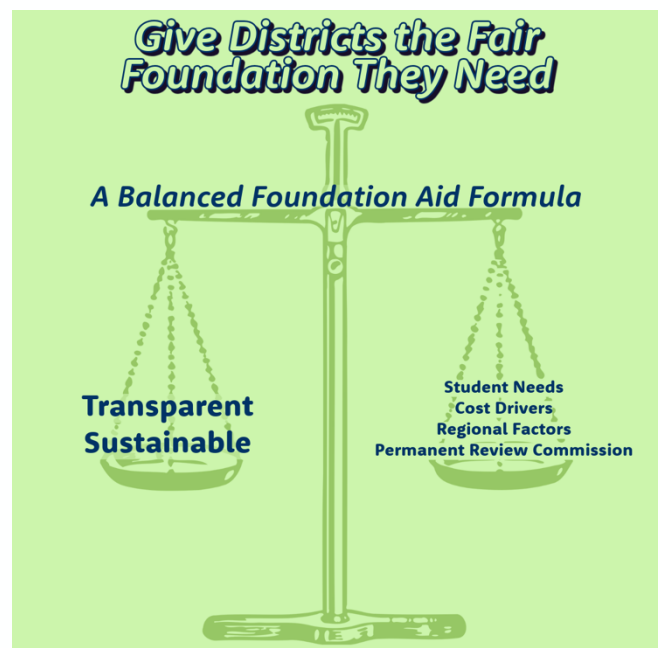
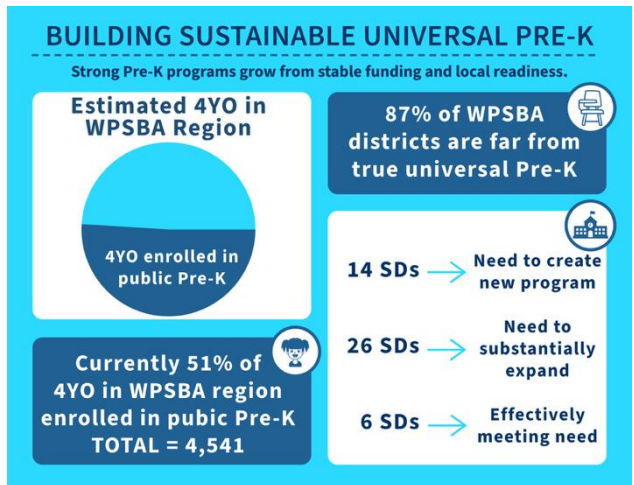
Deep Roots. Strong Schools. Bright Futures.

With a shared focus on student success, New York's leaders have demonstrated a commitment to public education. Building on that foundation, thoughtful policy choices can ensure schools remain strong, stable, and responsive to the needs of all students.

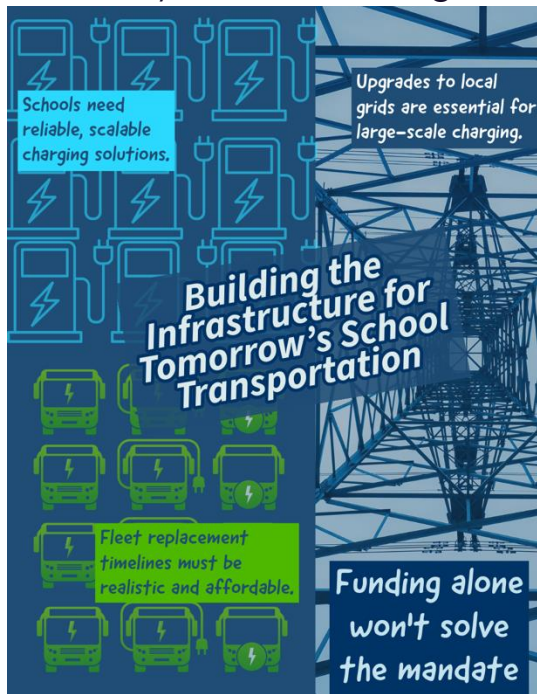
We support the Governor's proposed increase to the **Pre-K aid** per-pupil rate. The ability of school districts in our region to provide additional seats for 4-year-olds depends greatly on these funds. Meeting the demand for additional seats and new programs in such a short timeframe will require considerable effort.

New York should revisit and analyze the Rockefeller Institute's **Foundation Aid** recommendations, establish a permanent Foundation Aid Review Commission, and comprehensively update the formula so it accurately reflects student needs, regional cost drivers, and fiscal realities—including for the many districts currently on save harmless. Additional study is needed on the base foundation amount, the special education aid formula, and the recalibration of the local share to reflect limits of the tax cap. In the meantime, a minimum increase of 1% to the 70% of districts on save harmless is insufficient to manage current cost increases. These reforms should be phased in to limit volatility and ensure stable, equitable funding that protects students.

We continue to push for common sense revisions to the **tax levy cap**, including unused levy to be carried forward, and exempting non-academic costs.



Unfunded mandates strain school budgets and reduce local flexibility. Reinstating a statewide Mandate Relief Redesign Team and requiring fiscal impact statements for all new mandates would promote transparency, efficiency, and full funding, allowing districts to direct resources to students.

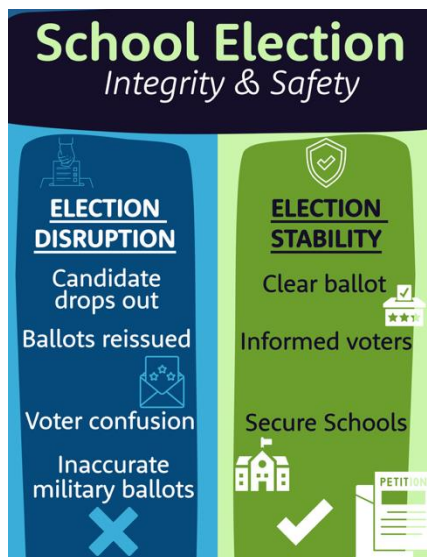


Transitioning to **zero-emission school buses** requires realistic timelines, adequate infrastructure, and meaningful state support. Supply limitations, infrastructure needs, and voter approval challenges make a universal 2027 mandate impractical without adjustments, including updated building allowances for garages, depots, and charging readiness, flexibility for impractical routes, and price controls on bus and battery costs.

Rising retiree health care costs are straining school budgets and crowding out classroom resources. Allowing districts to create **reserve funds for Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB)** would enable long-term planning, reduce future cost spikes, and protect funding for students without new state spending.

State law should support fair, efficient **school elections**.

Ending the 2nd petition period and giving districts control over polling locations will improve transparency, protect voters, & reduce costs.



The Case For OPEB Reserves!

OPEB Costs Are Growing Faster Than School Revenues — but Districts Have No Tool to Plan for Them

- OPEB outlays $\uparrow$ 59% (2010–2021)
- District revenues $\uparrow$ 26% (2010–2021)
- Annual OPEB costs expected to top 10% of district revenues by 2050 (currently less than 5%)
- NYS districts are not allowed to reserve for these costs

Responsible Fiscal Planning

Allowing districts to pre-fund OPEB is the only fiscally responsible way to manage an obligation that is rising at more than twice the pace of revenue.

Protecting public education requires **ensuring that public funds remain focused on public schools** and are not redirected through voucher programs or charter authorizations that bypass community input. NYS should decline participation in the OBBBA voucher program and reassess policies that increasingly subsidize charter schools without local consent. Charter school authorization and expansion should require approval from impacted school districts and their communities, with NYSED serving as the sole authorizing entity. Strong public schools rely on transparent, community-based decision-making.

Outdated **civil service** hiring systems make it harder for schools to fill essential positions when students need support the most. Modernizing exam schedules, updating test content, and streamlining the canvassing process will help districts hire qualified staff more quickly while maintaining fair & transparent standards.

Modernize Civil Service Hiring

Streamlined processes support timely, qualified staffing in public schools.

Exam Frequency



Modern Exam Content



Updated Canvassing Process



Modern civil service systems help schools fill critical roles faster.

School calendars should be shaped by the communities they serve. Allowing districts to design their own schedules supports effective instruction while respecting local needs and priorities.

Community Voice in Charter Decisions

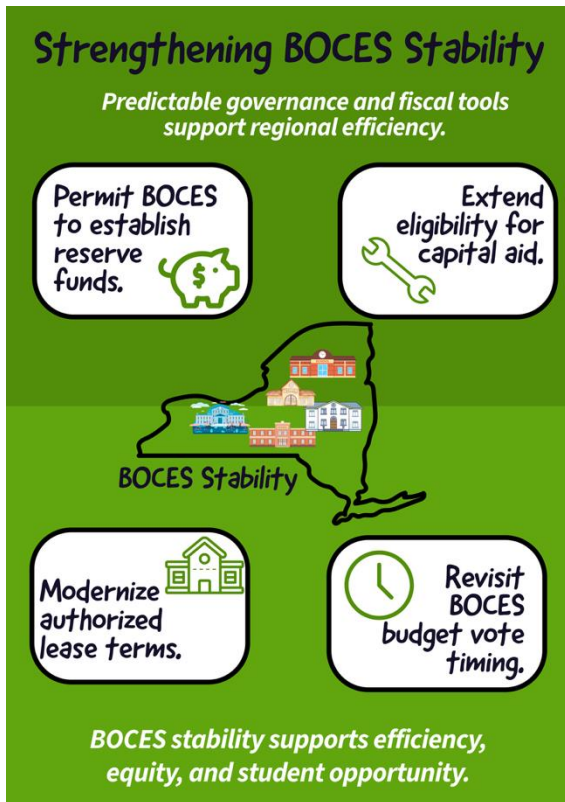
- Require charter proposals to incorporate meaningful community input before state consideration.
- Ensure both voters and NYSED approve charter applications.
- Approve charter expansion through the same process.



Local voice ensures transparency, accountability, and trust.

Strong public schools are built by investing in students and educators.

BOCES need modern financial tools to remain stable and effective. Allowing reserves, expanding capital aid eligibility, and revisiting budget vote timing will help ensure consistent services for students and school districts statewide.



Providing high-quality **special education** services requires policies that are fair, consistent, and financially sustainable. Establishing reasonable cost boundaries for out-of-district placements and clarifying the burden of proof for parentally placed students will help ensure public resources are used responsibly while preserving access to services for students with disabilities.

Special Act School Districts (SASDs) serve students with the most intensive needs and depend on stable, predictable funding and coordinated oversight. Codifying updated tuition methodologies and requiring agency-school information sharing are essential to ensuring continuity of instruction and high-quality services.

Special Act School Districts

Students with the highest needs rely on stable, predictable SASD funding.

What SASDs Need:

- Require agency-school sharing of critical student information.
- Maintain and codify recent methodology enhancements recommended by SED.

Protect continuity of instruction for students requiring intensive support.

Strong school systems protect students and the services they rely on.

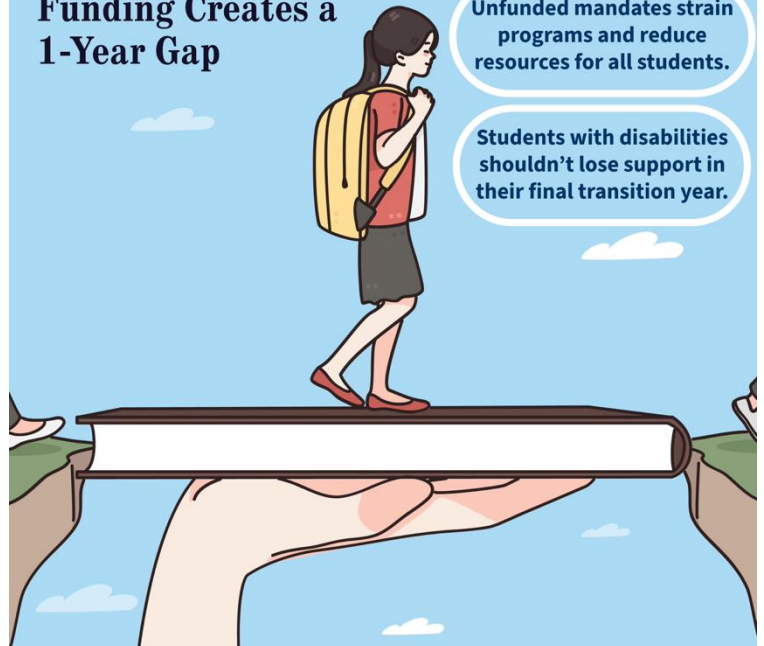
Federal law requires schools to provide **special education services through age 22**.

Currently, state Foundation Aid is only provided through age 21, leaving districts to absorb 100% of the cost until the student's 22nd birthday. The State must align Foundation Aid and excess cost aid to fully fund this obligation without diverting resources from other students.

By shifting its 18.4 percent share of **residential placement costs** to school districts, New York State has created a \$30 million annual burden on local budgets. Reversing this cost shift would provide immediate relief and help districts focus resources on students.

Education to 22 Requires Funding to 22

A Mandate Without Funding Creates a 1-Year Gap



State funding ends at 21 — leaving districts to absorb 100% of the cost.

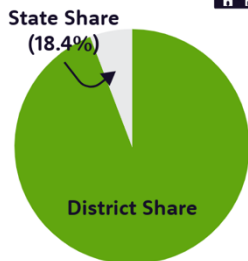
Unfunded mandates strain programs and reduce resources for all students.

Students with disabilities shouldn't lose support in their final transition year.

Close the Gap. Fund the Mandate.

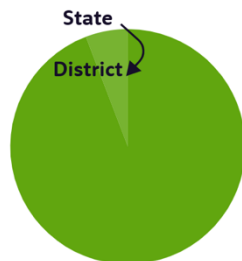
SPECIAL EDUCATION COST SHIFT

State Responsibility



NYS previously paid its share of residential placement costs

Shifted to Schools



That cost has been shifted to local school districts



\$30 MILLION COST SHIFT TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Schools play a central role in the **mental health** continuum, supporting many students but unable to meet growing needs alone. Allowing districts to provide telehealth services and creating an expense-driven aid stream for school-based mental health supports and community partnerships would expand equitable access and strengthen student well-being statewide.

Protecting public education means every student can succeed.