



Testimony of

*New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers
(NYS Parent Teacher Association)*

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School Infrastructure and Facilities

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I am Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, the Executive Director of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA), and am proud to represent nearly 300,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents of 2.6 million New York school children.

NYS PTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on discussions regarding school facilities and decisions affecting infrastructure impact on children and families statewide.

Thank you to Assembly Education Chairwoman Catherine Nolan for your interest and attendance today. Your dedicated work on behalf of our students and children should be commended and we thank you for your continued commitment.

In many communities, the school building and facilities are *the* community hub, not only used for before, during, and afterschool services, but often the location of local libraries, arts and sports and many community events. We measure the care for our children with the quality of our school buildings and facilities.

BOCES Capital Expenses Tax Cap Exclusion

For the past 70 years, our great 37 Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) have been hubs of innovation and collaboration, serving thousands of our students in different and unique ways. BOCES, by design, share facilities and leverage resources to provide services that are often economically challenging outside this partnership.

BOCES students, like all students, deserve adequate, modern and safe facilities. The prohibition on excluding BOCES capital expenses from the tax cap can negatively affect students attending classes and coursework in our BOCES buildings, and further creates a huge disincentive for schools to approve BOCES capital projects.

We are grateful that legislation was passed by both houses this session which excludes Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) capital expenses from tax cap calculations. We look forward to the Governor's signature on this common sense modification to the state's tax cap.

Smart Schools Bond Act

The infusion of funds into our education system through the Smart Schools Bond Act was a welcomed development in support for our schools and children.

We appreciate and acknowledge that many districts are still in the planning process, and that some districts have only used partial allocations for their plans. We are excited that plans include technology and school security improvements, and necessary expansions to increase space for pre-k and kindergarten programs.

As a parent organization, we continue to ask school leaders to proactively involve their parents and families in this planning process and decision. Real family engagement is a constant two-way conversation between parents and school educators and leaders.

We strongly encourage schools to have at least monthly meetings with their parent leaders, either their Parent Teacher Association or other parent group, and encourage districts to appoint a parent representative to all of their planning and decision making committees.

We know districts will always keep the student in mind, asking how they best use these funds to support our children.

We share concern, however, that the state approval process for use of funds has been slower than anticipated. This can be a concern as districts plan for upcoming years in their own annual budgeting process.

Lead in Water

Supporting the whole child is a priority of NYS PTA, and protecting our children from lead exposure must be, and continue to be, a focus for us all. NYS PTA proudly has Health and Wellness Coordinators that work closely with stakeholders to protect and support children's health and safety.

NYS PTA fiercely advocated for legislation requiring testing of drinking water in schools, and we were thrilled when legislation was enacted mandating that all public schools test their water by either September 31 or October 31, 2016.

Now that tests have occurred, remediation and continued monitoring is key. We were pleased that the State Education Department and Department of Health promulgated regulations intended to support children.

We are also pleased that this law requires continued monitoring and are hopeful that the next round of first-draw samples due in 2020, or earlier if determined by the Commissioner of Health, are found with significantly less or zero levels of lead.

We continue to remind our members that school districts;

- must have results posted on their website, so parents, families and others can understand results;
- must have remediation plans posted; and
- must post results of future lead testing no later than 6 weeks after the school received the laboratory report.

NYS PTA has also advocated on other environmental issues in schools as it relates to facilities:

- We support indoor air quality guidelines for school;
- We support protecting of groundwater supplies, especially near schools and communities;
- We support efforts to identify and remediate soil contamination on schools grounds;

- We support reducing and phasing out the use of polyvinyl chloride plastics and polystyrene products in schools; and
- We urge the elimination of use of toxic materials in school facilities.

We cannot let this important work lapse, and must advocate that districts and community partners continue to ensure our water is safe for our children – in and out of school.

Conclusion

Together, we need to continue to build the success of our community through investments and support for our key resource; our children. Our schools make a difference each day for our children, and we need to support them.

We humbly ask that you continue to advocate for infusing our schools with the tools and resources necessary to accelerate the success of our children and families. Together, we can make every child's potential a reality. No other work is more important.