



Reject School-Based Budget Reporting Mandates

The Executive Budget proposal to link school aid increases to State Education Department and Division of Budget approval of detailed school-based budget statements must be rejected. This measure would apply to the Big 5 school districts beginning in 2018-2019. An additional ten school districts (Binghamton, Brentwood, Elmira, Hempstead, Jamestown, Newburgh, Niagara Falls, Rome, Schenectady and Utica) would be impacted starting in 2019-2020.

While the Assembly budget rejects this proposal outright, the Senate has advanced a modified version. Under the Senate proposal, reporting mandates would be limited to the Big 5 school districts. The Senate bill does not require state approval of district statements.

Despite the Senate's modifications to the Executive proposal, the language poses serious timeline and implementation concerns. The Big 5 school district budgets are subject to municipal approval and this often occurs in June. A July 1 reporting requirement is not feasible as school districts will still be in the midst of making allocation determinations at this point in time.

Furthermore, the value of collecting and analyzing school-based budget data is tenuous to say the least. Allocation plans are subject to numerous modifications throughout the school year in response to shifts in pupil demographics and building needs. Mobility rates are extraordinarily high in the Big 5 school districts. In addition, recent enrollment growth in each of the Big 5 includes large numbers of English Language Learners and Special Education pupils, many of which have arrived after the school year began. These pupils and the additional services they require can result in mid-year adjustments to school funding allocations.

School district financial transparency has never been greater. As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts are already required to report on per pupil, school building-level expenditures, a far more valuable data set than allocation statements would provide. Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, parents, policy makers and tax payers will have details of the actual expenditures, on a per pupil, building by building level, of every district in the State. Furthermore, school districts are already subject to a plethora of other financial accountability measures including, Contract For Excellence expenditure requirements, set-asides under Foundation Aid, state and federal programs and fiscal audits.

Enactment of the proposed school-based budget reporting measures would not provide meaningful transparency or enhanced accountability. It would place another onerous mandate on school districts and divert valuable resources away from the classroom.

We urge you to reject any new school-based budget reporting mandates.