

# New York State Educational Conference Board



**For Release:** November 10, 2020

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## Education Leaders Call for State to Keep Faith with School Districts on Transportation Reimbursement

**ALBANY**—The Educational Conference Board, representing parents, teachers, other school staff, administrators and board of education members across New York State, today released the following statement:

On Friday, the State Education Department issued a memorandum advising that school districts will not be allowed to receive anticipated Transportation Aid for expenses incurred between the time schools closed last spring and the end of the school year—from mid-March into June.

Without a remedy, school districts would be denied state help for costs they incurred while complying in good faith with state mandates to maintain services for students and families while schools were closed to in-person instruction. The aid losses could approach one-half billion dollars statewide.

The Department also indicated that it will submit legislation to enable districts to receive the aid they had reason to anticipate for that time span.

During the period in question, school districts were not transporting students to and from school—that is why their costs have been deemed ineligible for state reimbursement. But many were using school buses to distribute student meals and instructional materials. Some used their buses to create mobile hotspots to enable students to participate in remote instruction.

In taking these actions, school systems were complying with the Governor’s Executive Order directing that they continue those critical services for students and families. To deny state reimbursement for their efforts now would constitute a breach of faith with those school districts and their taxpayers.

Some districts also continued to pay transportation employees and vendors after schools closed in order to ensure they would retain the ability to transport all children in the event it did become possible to resume in-person instruction last spring.

Also, the federal CARES Act directed any school district and other entity receiving assistance, “...to the greatest extent practicable, continue to pay its employees and contractors during the period of any disruptions or closures related to Coronavirus.”

The Education Department stated that its legislative proposal will allow reimbursement for the costs of keeping employees and vendors on standby through May 1, the date Governor Cuomo announced that schools would remain closed for the remainder of the school year. We advocate allowing reimbursement for districts which continued paying employees and vendors throughout the year, consistent with the CARES Act.

Denying state reimbursement would have devastating consequences for schools and their students, reducing aid by approximately one-half billion dollars. The impact would be compounded coming so far into the school year, narrowing the options available to districts to achieve offsetting savings.

Our groups highlighted concerns about the aidability of these mandated services with executive and legislative contacts last spring. But no definitive information was shared until Friday’s memo from the Education Department.

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Without adequate help from Washington, the state's current budget challenges may require reductions in aid to schools. But they should not be imposed by denying schools assistance for the good faith efforts they made to sustain essential services for students and families and to comply with extraordinary state directives.