

Testimony of

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

By

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NYS Education Budget

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Albany via Technology

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 250,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents and families of our 2.6 million public school children.

Our State President, Dana Platin, a kindergarten school-related professional in the great Sachem School District, has also pre-taped a message, which will be shared separately.

NYS PTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on how the Executive Budget impacts children and families statewide.

Thank you to Assembly and Senate Finance Chairs, Education Chairs, committee members, and members of the legislature for your continued commitment to ALL children, their families, and our schools.

For the past immediate years, we have watched in awe as dedicated, outstanding educators, school-related professionals, and staff members do ALL we can to serve ALL children. Public education is our nation's greatest hope. It is the promise that all children - regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, learning abilities or disabilities, spoken word - have a right to a free, appropriate, high-quality education, one that will meet their diverse needs and support them in our 21st century global economy.

It is public school that gives every child an equal chance to grow into a successful and flourishing member of society. A public education lays the foundation for a lifetime of opportunity and accomplishment, but while our children try to learn, and our educators try to teach, what you may not see are the struggles behind the scenes.

Continued struggles with digital access and equity, heightened and increased need for mental health support and services for students and staff, the shifting priorities in a school building, remote teaching and remote learning, continued the fears of illness. Schools face all these challenges daily.

And parents and families have now been combatting this pandemic for two years - far longer than we could have ever imagined. We have dealt with unemployment, underemployment, food insecurity, trauma, sickness, and mental health concerns for our children and for ourselves. We are juggling work, family, childcare, remote learning and health concerns. At the same time, we try to figure out how to get free or low-cost Wi-Fi for learning. We try to figure out how to keep our children fed with healthy meals. We try to figure out how to keep the lights and heat on, while searching for employment.

We cannot do this alone, and thank the members of the legislature and Governor Hochul - as we know we have partners in you.

School Aid

The Executive Budget provides \$31.3 billion in total School Aid for SY 2023. This represents a year-to-year increase of \$2.1 billion (7.1%), including a \$1.6 billion Foundation Aid increase and a \$466 million increase in all other School Aid programs. It also ensures each school district receives a minimum year-to-year Foundation Aid increase of 3%.

NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal. This is a major victory for children, a significant amount of school aid, and in line with the NYS PTA and NYS Educational Conference Board school aid request, which can be found here: https://nyspta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ECB-School-Aid-Paper-2021_Final.pdf

Fully funding Foundation Aid will greatly and positively impact the lives of our 2.6 million school children. The greatest of thanks must go to the Legislature for their continued commitment to our children, and to Governor Hochul for her partnership.

However as with any formula, there are winners and losers. We fully appreciate the minimum percentage increase of 3%, as many school districts are at the minimum despite the overall impressive statewide aid increase. For these districts, many of them small, rural, or low to moderate wealth, this school aid package is not the win-fall it is for others.

As we move forward in future years and reach full funding, it is important to have conversations on what a meaningful and adequate school aid formula is, how we can best leverage state and tax dollars to support children, and what changes we may need to see that every child – no matter their zip code – receives the highest quality education that NY can afford them

Expense-Based Aids

The Executive Budget includes full funding of expense-based aid, such as school construction, pupil transportation, BOCES services, and the educational costs of certain students with disabilities. The running of the statutory formula is projected to increase expense-based aids by \$464 million, or 5.9%.

NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal.

Pre-K and Child Care Funding: An Opportunity

The Executive Budget includes \$952 million annually to support public prekindergarten programs, which is the current funding formula for prekindergarten programs.

While NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal, we look to the legislature for meaningful increases in funding for high-quality school-based pre-K programs.

All children should have complete and equal access to high-quality pre- school and kindergarten educational opportunities. Parents and families play an integral role in pre-school, and high-quality programs must include attention to the unique developmental nature of the social/emotional, physical and academic experience of young children in a manner that addresses the whole child.

The Executive Budget continues funding for childcare, with the \$832 million NYS Child Care Block Grant, which serves 132,000 NYS children. Further, using federal funding, NYS has distributed \$900 million in Child Care Stabilization Grants.

NYS PTA supports the increase and expansion of child care subsidies and grants for families and school and community-based providers, and looks to the legislature for increases in this funding.

The pandemic has shown us that high-quality and affordable childcare for parents and families is not a luxury, but a must for our workforce, and a must for our birth to 3 children. By focusing on increased supports for our earliest learners, we will support both their families, and our children's life long journey.

Afterschool Programs, Early High School, PTECH and Community schools

We appreciate that the proposal continues current law funding levels for after-school programming, early college high schools, P-TECH programs, community schools, and Smart Schools Bond Act - all priorities of NYS PTA.

We continue to seek increases in all of these critical programs that truly support our children. Early-college high schools and P-TECH programs lead to greater graduation rates and successes in college and career.

Support for Community Schools are critical, as they continue to be an effective strategy for student and family success, and often address the health, social, and socio-emotional needs of students and their families.

While we understand set-asides for community school funding, ALL schools should be afforded the opportunity to transform schools into community hubs for learning and family support and funding for any school to support this model should be included in the final State Budget.

Building/Transportation Aid Penalty Forgiveness

The Executive Budget addresses Building and Transportation Aid penalties by authorizing SED to forgive all such penalties that the Department deems to be a result of inadvertent clerical errors.

NYS PTA fully supports this proposal.

Special Act Schools

Funding for Special Act Schools and students with disabilities is critical. The Executive Budget has authorized a cost-of-living adjustment of 11% for SY 2023 tuition rates. This is an increase of more than \$240 million for these special schools.

NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal.

Committee on Special Education Placements

The Executive Budget shifts the cost of certain special education placements on school districts.

NYS PTA strongly opposes this proposal, and has in past years when it was included. We look to the legislature to reject this proposal once again.

School Lunch Programs

The Executive Budget would transfer the National School Lunch Program from SED to the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

NYS PTA strongly opposes this transfer and ask that the legislature fully reject this proposal.

Currently, SED oversees and administers five federal Child Nutrition Programs and other related federal and State Initiatives that generate an astounding \$1.4 billion in federal and State funding directly to schools. Yet, SED receives no state administrative funding to support the implementation of these initiatives.

An overwhelming majority of states lay these programs with their Education Departments, and this change would actually require a federal waiver. Only 5 states have our school lunch program outside of their State Education Department. Further, SED has developed both the personnel expertise, and the technology over the years to administer these critical programs for our children.

The Department of Agriculture and Markets does currently manage the state funded Farm-to-School grant program, and alarmingly, the State Comptroller's Office found that 21 of the 45 program contracts managed by Ag and Markets either lacked sufficient documentation to support expenses paid, or were not actually authorized under the contract. You can read this report here: <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/state-agencies/audits/2021/04/19/oversight-farm-school-program>.

We cannot let our children, and their need for these critical food nutrition programs down. This function must remain in the purview of SED, and we cannot accept anything less than SED's fantastic commitment and full attention to our School Lunch Program.

The Executive Budget also expands support for both school lunch programs, and farm to school initiatives. NYS PTA supports these proposals, and further supports expansion of farm to school incentives and farm to school grants.

Recover from COVID School Program (RECOVS)

The Executive Budget includes a total of \$100 million over two years (\$50 million per year) for a new matching fund, the Recover from COVID School Program (RECOVS), for high-need school districts to:

- create or expand summer learning, after school, or extended-day and extended-year programs to help students recover academically; and
- also support the hiring of mental health professionals, the expansion of school-based mental health services, and other evidence-based mental health supports to help students and school staff recover socioemotionally.

School districts will be required to match this State grant funding with their Federal pandemic relief funds.

While NYS PTA is supportive of this funding, we prefer funding to be non-competitive, non-matching, and available to ALL school districts.

Further, there is also a meaningful opportunity for the legislature to act to increase support for school-based mental health programs, services and initiatives for our children.

Mental health support for our students must be of highest priority, and we continue to be concerned about the lack of adequate and dedicated funding for mental health for our students, our educators, and their families.

The pandemic has drastically increased the need for mental health services for students for many reasons – trauma, loss of loved ones, isolation, depression, anxiety. NOW is the time where we need MORE services for students, MORE counselors, social workers, psychologists and professional and support staff to see that each child, no matter their zip code, is adequately supported.

NYS PTA also supports the \$2 million for school climate grants.

Strengthen Suicide Prevention and Children’s Community-based Mental Health Programs

The Executive Budget includes \$10 million to increase health and suicide prevention programs available for youth and families experiencing a mental health crisis, with an expansion of the Home-Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI) program and the establishment of a Mental Wellness Community Workforce.

The Executive Budget also includes integration of behavioral health services into pediatric primary care visits through the Healthy Steps program and invests \$7.5 million in Residential Treatment Facilities for children.

NYS PTA continues to support expansion of programs to assist youth and families in mental health crisis.

Teacher Support Initiatives

The Executive Budget includes a number of teacher support initiatives, to both support our classroom teachers and staff, and address the looming teacher shortage crisis.

These initiatives include amendments on teacher certification, measures to support the teacher shortage crisis, and funding and programs to support professional development and growth for current teachers including the Master Teacher Program, and Al Shanker Grants.

NYS PTA strongly supports these initiatives, and further support for our fantastic and dedicated educators. Supporting in-service educators has never been more important. They have been on the front lines of the pandemic each and every day, doing all they can to support and protect our students.

Charter Schools

The Executive Budget increases NYC charter schools’ per-pupil funding by 4.7%.

NYS PTA continues to be seriously concerned with the diversion of funds away from traditional public schools, and with many troubling operations of charter schools and charter school management companies. However, we support individual parent choice.

We also fully support SED having final approval authority over the charter approval process for ALL NYS charter school application. Charters must have greater accountability, and SED oversight of the approval process will greatly benefit our students who attend them.

Nonpublic Schools

The Executive Budget includes \$295 million for nonpublic schools, which represents an increase of \$44 million (18%).

The Executive Budget also authorizes any unobligated Federal Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools funds to be used to reimburse nonpublic schools for allowable pandemic-related costs through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund.

NYS PTA has no position on these proposals.

Zero-Emission School Buses

The Executive Budget requires that all new school bus purchases be zero emissions by 2027 and all school buses on the road be zero emissions by 2035.

The Executive Budget says the State will provide Transportation Aid for zero-emission bus infrastructure, including charging stations and purchasing or leasing electric buses. It also authorizes school districts to lease or finance zero-emission buses for 10 years, double the current five-year limitation for diesel buses.

We believe these provisions will be challenging both fiscally, practically, and by timeline, for districts to implement, and will likely need amendments. However, we look forward to conversations on this initiative.

NYC Mayoral Control

The Executive Budget provides a four-year extension of Mayoral control of the New York City school system.

NYS PTA has no position on this proposal.

Native American Reservation Schools

The Executive Budget provides \$35.7 million for capital improvements to the three State-owned schools on Native American reservations, including the St. Regis Mohawk School, the Tuscarora School, and the Onondaga School.

NYS PTA supports this funding.

Higher Education Initiatives

Expand Access to TAP

The Executive Budget includes \$150 million to expand TAP, to cover students enrolled in six or more credits of study, and expands part-time TAP to cover students enrolled in workforce credential programs at community colleges in high-demand fields.

NYS PTA fully supports these proposals, and welcomes additional support for our higher-ed students and those entering trade and careers.

Increase in Higher Ed Aid

The Executive Budget includes a \$24 million (10%) increase in funding for educationally disadvantaged students through higher education opportunity programs and training centers administered by CUNY, SUNY, and private colleges.

NYS PTA fully supports this proposal.

Investments in SUNY and CUNY

The Executive Budget includes a number of increases in funding to support the SUNY and CUNY systems.

NYS PTA fully supports these proposals.

Provide Childcare at All SUNY and CUNY Campuses

The Executive Budget includes \$15.6 million to expand childcare to all SUNY and CUNY campuses.

NYS PTA supports this proposal, and other programs that expand affordable childcare access for students and families.

Other Initiatives

Maternal Health

The Executive Budget includes \$20 million designed to expand access to prenatal and postnatal care, and initiatives to support postpartum medical coverage.

NYS PTA supports this proposal.

Environmental Bond Act

The Executive Budget will authorize a new Bond Act, at \$4 billion. The Bond Act will also support an investment in the Clean Green Schools initiative.

NYS PTA supports this proposal.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Federal Investment

The Executive Budget includes \$300 million in Federal drinking water appropriation authority to provide improvements in public water systems, specifically those in communities disproportionately impacted by lead and emerging contaminants in drinking water.

NYS PTA supports these proposals.

Office of Gun Violence Prevention

The Executive Budget provides authority for the establishment of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention under the Department of Health. Data collected on gun violence will be used by the Office of Gun Violence Prevention to track emerging gun violence hotspots and deploy resources to those areas that need it most.

The Executive Budget also continues funding for Triple Investment in Community-Based Gun Violence Response SNUG Outreach Program, supports for families of victims of gun violence, and invests in gun violence prevention programs.

NYS PTA generally supports child protection and gun safety proposals that have a positive effect on children and families.

Opioid and Substance Use Treatment and Prevention

The Executive Budget provides an increase of \$402 million in operating and capital support for OASAS to enhance prevention, treatment, and recovery programs and invests more than \$100 million in new resources from the Opioid Stewardship Tax and litigation settlements with pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors.

The Executive Budget also includes a number of treatment and recovery initiatives, included mobile treatment services for opioid addiction, investments in opioid use prevention and treatment, and support for recovery supportive housing.

NYS PTA supports these initiatives.

Broadband Investments and ConnectALL Initiative

The Executive Budget includes a number of initiatives to support the expansion of high-quality, low-cost and affordable broadband for families, including rural broadband grants and digital equity programs.

NYS PTA supports these proposals, and fully supports free access to broadband for all low-income, high-need NYS families, and continued tech and digital equity initiatives.

The pandemic truly brought tech and digital equity issues to light. We continue to be concerned with the lack of broadband access in many communities, and lack of devices to support students, as meaningful access to high-quality, free or low-cost broadband is critical for all students.

According to recent NYS Education Department survey data, more than 215,000 NYS students do not have access to a computer, Chromebook or tablet to use for instruction. The same survey

indicated that 165,000 NYS students lack internet access to fully participate in home/remote instruction and learning. While we have seen these numbers improve, until every child has both access and a device capable of connection, we have work to do.

It is likely some form of remote learning continues for the foreseeable future. We must do better in supporting our students and families to meet the technology demands of 21st century learning.

We also fully support Senator Mayer's E-Learn proposal, and look forward to its passage and enactment.

In Conclusion

Every parent and family have a dream for their children. It is our job to be dream makers, ensuring every child, no matter their zip code, no matter their ethnicity, no matter their ability, no matter their gender identity, no matter their race, has the highest quality 21st century education to lead them to success in college, career or life.

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 Shine a Light on Every Child, and make every child's potential a reality. No other work is more important.