

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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I am Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, the Executive Director of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA), and on behalf of our President Patricia Frazier, I am proud to represent our 225,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents, families, and educators of our 2.6 million school children. It is our mission to make every child's potential a reality and support EVERY child with ONE voice.

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.

First and foremost, thank you to our educators, teachers, school-related professionals, school leaders, mental health professionals, and staff for their dedication and tireless commitment to our children. They are not thanked enough, and make a difference in the lives of children each and every day. On behalf of the parents and families of our 2.6 million school children, thank you.

We also thank the legislature, Commissioner Rosa, the dedicated team at the State Education Department, and the Board of Regents for your continued commitment to our children, their families, their educators and their schools.

And thank you to Governor Hochul for this Executive Budget. It is a fantastic starting point that supports students, children, and their families.

At a time when our students struggle with food insecurity and poverty, heightened need for mental health support, increased need for academic intervention, and the need for increased support for migrant students, students with disabilities, homeless students, English Language Learners, and ALL children, this Executive Budget supports them. We are wholly supportive of the many initiatives in this Executive Budget, and look forward to their enactment.

School Aid

The Executive Budget provides \$39.3 billion in total School Aid for SFY 2027, and increases expected school aid by \$1.6 billion, or 4.3%:

1. \$779 million increase (3%) in Foundation Aid
2. \$287 million increase (2.1%) in other programs
3. The proposal also fully funds expense-based aids and other current statutory formulas at \$282 million.
4. The proposal establishes a 1% minimum increase in Foundation Aid for school districts.

The proposal also includes an impressive \$561 million for Universal Pre-kindergarten Aid.

NYS PTA strongly supports these proposals, and we continue to support increased stability in funding, especially for our high need, low wealth school districts. **We also strongly support at least a 2% minimum increase for all school districts in their overall Foundation Aid increase.**

This proposal is a meaningful investment in our children, especially with inclusion of at least a minimum 2% funding level.

Please also see the recommendations of the NYS Educational Conference Board, of which NYS PTA is Vice Chair: https://nyspta.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/ECB_2026-27_Finance_Paper_FINAL.pdf

Expense-Based Aids

The Executive Budget includes formula 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 \$282 million, or a 2.9% increase.

NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal.

School Meals for All

For the SECOND time, the Executive Budget includes FULL funding for School Meals for All at \$395 million, a \$55 million increase over last year (16.2%), requiring that all schools that participate in the national school lunch program (public, charter, and nonpublic) provide free breakfast and lunch meals to all students.

Under this now established program, the state will pay the student's share of the cost for all meals served to students not already receiving free meals. Data just in from our partners Hunger Solutions NY:

- More than 5,000 schools across NYS are providing universal school meals in the current 2025-2026 school year.
- More than 2.7 million New York students have access to free school meals in the current 2025-2026 school year.
- An estimated 700,000 New York students have gained access to free school meals since NY began expanding free school meals.

NYS PTA supports this continued proposal in the strongest terms, and seeks its full inclusion in the final enacted budget. This has been a long-standing priority of NYS PTA and its members.

In addition, NYS PTA also supports adds of \$8.5 million to sustain SNAP navigators (Nutrition Outreach and Education Program) and adds of \$30 million to fill budget gaps at local WIC agencies to ensure they can serve all eligible families.

SNAP navigators are an especially important piece for schools, given the new SNAP outreach rule—it will be critical for schools to have local SNAP navigators to partner with for outreach and referrals. If funding for SNAP navigators is not supported, NYS will need to scale back SNAP navigators by around 25%, which will have a devastating impact on students and families.

The Executive Budget does continue \$106 million for other nutrition programs, including \$51 million for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and \$55 million for the Nourish New York Program. It also invests an additional \$15 million to expand HPNAP funding to the State's regional network of food banks and food pantries.

NYS PTA supports these proposals.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

The Executive Budget makes significant investments in moving towards a truly universal Pre-Kindergarten system.

The proposal includes \$561 million, an increase of 52.5 percent, for funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten Aid. The Executive's plan provides funding for a roll-in of universal full-day Pre-K for all four-year-olds by the start of SY 2029.

The proposal also increases the State's contribution for Pre-K seats for four-year-olds to equal the greater of \$10,000 or the district's current selected Foundation Aid per pupil. NYS PTA strongly supports this proposal and support for school districts.

All children should have complete and equal access to high-quality school-based Pre-K. Studies have shown that universal Pre-K leads to greater academic and social-emotional success, closing achievement gaps, and reductions in intervention and special education services.

NYS PTA applauds these proposals.

Childcare Investments

The Executive Budget proposes a number of investments in child care, child care subsidies, child and dependent care tax credits, and cost savings for parents and families. The proposal also supports the Office of Child Care and Early Education.

NYS PTA supports these investment in families, as they care for their children.

Support for Math Instruction and Learning

The Executive Budget has numerous proposals related to math instruction and learning:

- Requires SED to provide school districts with instructional best practices in the teaching of math to students in kindergarten through 5th grade,
- Provides \$2 million to NYSUT Education and Learning Trust to deliver training to educators on instructional best practices for numeracy and evidence-based math instruction, and
- Provides \$2 million for regional hub pilots operated by BOCES to provide training and support to educators in school districts with low levels of math performance.

NYS PTA supports all funding and programs for increasing academic instructional support of students.

Preschool and Summer School Special Education Programs

The Executive Budget fully funds the State share of costs for preschool and summer school special education programs, and includes an increase in reimbursement to school districts for the cost of summer school services.

In all, the proposal provides:

- \$1.27 billion to reimburse counties for the cost of preschool special education services, which reflects a \$173 million increase of 15.8%, and
- \$437 million to reimburse school districts for the cost of summer school services, which reflects a \$24 million increase of 5.8%.

NYS PTA strongly supports these proposals and looks for future funding increases for our students with disabilities. One issue of note is the high cost of transportation for these services, which is often driven by bussing contracts. This issue continues to be on the radar for NYS PTA, and we seek future conversations and solutions.

High Impact Tutoring

The Executive Budget provides \$9 million to support individualized literacy and math tutoring of students in high-need school districts.

NYS PTA supports all funding and programs for increasing academic instructional support of students.

Literacy/Libraries

The Executive Budget provides \$104.7 million in Library Aid, equal to the SFY2027 statutory funding formula.

The proposal also provides \$34 million for Library Construction in capital funding and continues the \$3 million appropriation to ensure access to the New York Online Virtual Electronic Library (NOVEL).

NYS PTA supports these proposals.

Support for State-Owned Special Schools

NYS PTA supports the proposals for \$45.6 million for capital improvements to the five State-owned schools:

- \$22.5 million for the State School for the Blind at Batavia,
- \$20.1 million for the three State owned schools on Native American reservations (the Onondaga School, the St. Regis Mohawk School, and the Tuscarora School), and
- \$3 million for the State School for the Deaf at Rome.

Early High School, P-TECH, STEM, Community Schools

NYS PTA supports funding for Early High School Programs, P-Tech, and STEM/STEAM Programs, including College in High School Opportunity Fund, Smart Scholars, Smart Transfer, and Pathways in Technology Early College High School programs.

We continue to seek increases in all of these essential programs that truly support our children, as they lead to greater graduation rates and success in college and career.

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

Support High Need/Low Income AP and IB test takers

We must find ways to support all students. During the last six years, NYS wonderfully saw the number of high need/low income students taking AP courses grow by 46% (while also seeing student performance improve). Access to AP course work saves families significant funds, and in 2025, students and families saved approximately \$254 million in college tuition and nearly \$80 million of those savings went to low income families.

Yet, this critical funding in the state budget has been frozen at \$5.8 million for more than six years. We are hopeful that the state's contribution can increase in this FY budget to \$10 million in total, so that between state support, and the College Boards contribution, the student share can be dropped to \$0.

School/Youth Mental Health Programs

The Executive Budget proposes over \$20 million to support the State's youth mental health framework. This includes:

- Investment of \$17.5 million to expand the Teen Mental Health First Aid Training program to all tenth-grade students statewide,
- \$1.8 million to ensure access to behavioral health services for LGBTQ+ youth,
- \$664,000 to ensure Indigenous students have access to mental health care,
- \$500,000 to increase the number of youth safe spaces programs (see below) and
- \$100,000 to recognize schools responding to youth mental health needs (see below).

The Executive Budget also:

- Directs OMH to develop a framework for evidence-based care for professionals working with children,
- Creates a 'Schools of Distinction in Prevention' Designation for OMH to recognize schools that meet key benchmarks in mental health and substance use prevention. Ten selected schools will receive technical assistance and implementation grants to respond to the youth mental health crisis,
- Supports OASAS to open up to 15 additional Youth Clubhouses, including through co-location with existing Recovery Community and Outreach Centers, and
- Empower OASAS to host a youth prevention symposium to promote peer-led engagement for young people around the dangers of substance use and the availability of community-based resources, and develop a comprehensive youth-focused campaign using social media, television, and digital streaming.

We also support the work of the NYS Office of Mental Health and State Education Department, to expand student and school-based mental health services, and fully support expansion of school

based mental health clinics, and the state's commitment to fund any school district which implements this program.

We are pleased that NYS PTA Executive Director Kyle Belokopitsky continues to serve with the MHANYS Mental Health Advisory Committee, and we proudly expanded our work with the NYS Office of Mental Health on a number of initiatives and programs. Further, the work of our own NYS PTA Mental Health Task Force continues. This taskforce has expanded NYS PTA mental health programs, identified new ways to support youth mental health, and increased community and school partnerships. We also continue to work with SED, MHANYS, the NYS School Counselors Association, the NYS Health Department, the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, NY Council on Problem Gambling, and other like state and federal agencies, offices and stakeholders. We have also expanded our work and now partner with Northwell Health's Katz Institute.

Know that NYS PTA stands ready to address and expand support for youth mental health.

Afterschool Support

NYS PTA supports continued investments in high-quality afterschool programming, and supports all state funding in these categories.

Teacher Support Initiatives

The Executive Budget includes a number of teacher support initiatives, of which NYS PTA supports. Our educators are the backbone of our schools, working each day to make every child's potential a reality. NYS PTA could never thank them enough for their commitment and dedication to our children.

We know teacher shortages are a REAL concern, and we in particular support the \$2 million to create an accelerated teacher preparation pathway for career changers and other interested individuals, and the \$2 million for programs to allow high school students interested in entering the teaching profession to earn college credit in relevant subjects.

Supporting in-service and pre-service education students has never been more important. We also continue to support full funding and increases for the Al Shanker Program, the Master Teacher Program, and other Teacher Excellence programs.

Charter Schools

The Executive Budget provides \$195 million for charter school supplemental tuition and \$177 million for charter school facilities aid.

NYS PTA continues to be seriously concerned with diverting 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 continue to be strongly opposed to the elimination of any statewide or regional cap on the number of charters that may be issued. We also remain opposed to reissuance of "ghost charter" licenses. We continue to fully support our State Education Department having final approval

authority over the charter approval process for ALL NYS charter school applications. Charters must have greater accountability, and SED oversight of the approval process will greatly benefit the students who attend them.

We are extremely concerned with the recent action of the SUNY chartering entity. After justifiable requests to three charter applications for more information from the State Education Department, the SUNY chartering entity moved the applications forward in direct divergence from NYSED - the ONLY appropriate entity who should be granting our state's charters. This is a continual occurrence – and MUST end.

Nonpublic Schools

The Executive Budget includes \$240 million for nonpublic schools for mandated aid, a \$10 million or a 4.3% increase, continues \$85.5 million for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) instruction (a 10% increase), \$90 million for capital health and safety projects, including critical repair and maintenance of nonpublic schools' facilities (a \$20 million or 28.6% increase), and \$5 million for arts and music instruction.

We support these proposals and the students and families in our nonpublic schools.

Reading and Language Acquisition Equality for Deaf Children (LEAD-K)

The Executive Budget supports LEAD-K, administered through DOH's Early Intervention (EI) and Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs, with a proposed \$100,000 in additional operating support to alleviate barriers to hearing loss screenings and language acquisition services for children who are potentially deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.

NYS PTA supports this program.

Zero-Emission School Bus Mandate

NYS PTA understands the effects of a changing climate and the impact on schools, students, and families, and applaud the aspirational goal of moving to a zero-emission policy.

However, we must at this time oppose the current mandate and timeline for zero-emission school busses in NYS. The barriers, limitations, problems, and costs are becoming insurmountable – and they can no longer be overlooked. Districts are having to choose between complying with this mandate or supporting the educational opportunities for their students.

The Educational Conference Board, of which NYS PTA is Vice Chair, has detailed many of these barriers here: <https://nyspta.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ecb-zero-emissions-school-bus-memo-01172025.pdf>

Please consider repealing this mandate, and we stand ready to work together on a solution that can support our environment, students, and schools.

Farm to School Initiatives

The Executive Budget maintains the existing structure of the 30% NYS Farm to School Initiative and the Farm-to-School Grants Program:

- Continues baseline funding for the existing 30% NY reimbursement program, districts that qualify under current statutory rules will continue to receive the \$0.19 per meal reimbursement for meeting the 30% local purchasing threshold, and
- Sustained funding for the NYS Farm to School Grants Program, which continues to support equipment, training, and capacity building projects that help schools expand their use of New York–grown foods and strengthen the farm to school supply chain.

NYS PTA also supports

- Modernization or statutory updates to the 30% NY Initiative, which would allow for inclusion of breakfast and snacks, and
- Increasing reimbursement to \$0.30 per meal with CPI adjustments.

Youth Employment

The Executive Budget invests an additional \$2.9 million to provide year-round employment opportunities for at-risk youth through the Summer Youth Employment Program and the Youth Opportunities Program.

NYS PTA supports these investments.

Luggage for Youth in Foster Care

The Executive Budget proposes \$572,000 for the purchase of luggage for youth placed in a foster care program outside of New York City, which operates a parallel purchasing program.

This was a priority of NYS PTA, and we support this proposal and thank the legislature and Governor Hochul for the enactment of this law last year.

Investments in SUNY and CUNY

The Executive Budget proposes \$1.3 billion in new capital funding for the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) systems, including:

- \$900 million to maintain and preserve campus facilities,
- \$100 million in additional funding for the Quantum Research & Innovation Hub at SUNY Stony Brook, and
- \$185 million for community colleges in both systems.

NYS PTA supports these investments in our public higher education system.

Arts

The Executive Budget supports investments in cultural arts and education, including:

- \$90 million for nonpublic school health and security grants, an increase of \$20 million,
- \$40 million for capital grants administered by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), and
- \$34 million for library construction grants.

NYS PTA supports these proposals.

Clean Water Funding

The Executive Budget proposes \$750 million for water infrastructure. However, only \$500 million is dedicated for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, which has funded filtration of toxic PFAS chemicals, replacement of lead service lines, and many other upgrades to aging and failing water infrastructure across the state since 2017. The other \$250 million is designated for an ill-defined new program to fund water infrastructure for housing development and preservation.

There are no requirements that this housing-related money support affordable housing and no guardrails to prevent the subsidizing of overdevelopment and sprawl that will ultimately harm water quality. By only maintaining funding for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act at \$500 million and not increasing it, the Governor is not providing any additional resources to support the state's highly oversubscribed, current clean water programs.

New York will not make sufficient progress to protect New Yorkers from toxic PFAS when they turn on the tap and eliminate 100% of the state's lead service lines without investing more in the Clean Water Infrastructure Act in this year's budget.

NYS PTA supports reallocating to the Clean Water Infrastructure Act at least \$200 million of the proposed funding for housing development and preservation, and establishing guardrails around the remaining housing-related money requiring that such housing be affordable and sustainable. In addition, we support including a dedicated line item for lead service line replacement within the Clean Water Infrastructure Act.

Alternative Nicotine and Vapor Products

The Executive Budget imposed additional taxes on Alternative Nicotine and Vapor Products, and imposes a new Vapor Products Registry. Illicit vapes and the sale of vapor products to youth continues to be of grave concern to NYS PTA. NYS PTA supports these proposals fully.

We also support legislation to close loopholes with regards to e-cigarettes and vapor products, read more here: <https://nyspta.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-Hochul-Sign-On-Letter-Flavored-Vape-Enforcement-E-Cigarette-Tax-Shift.pdf>

The 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey showed that more than 1 in 4 (26%) of current youth e-cigarette users use an e-cigarette daily which is recognized as a sign of serious addiction. And almost all of the students report exclusively using flavored e-cigarettes - one study found that 71 percent of survey participants between the ages of 14 and 21 would quit if they did not have flavor choices.

Effective enforcement of New York's law can help put a stop to the tobacco and vaping industry taking advantage of our youth and protect them from a lifetime of addiction. This is imperative as a survey conducted by Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center for the NYS Quitline found that 64 percent of New York healthcare professionals believe youth and young adults are facing a vaping epidemic and are concerned about nicotine addiction among younger generations.

Illicit Cannabis Sales

NYS PTA continues our strongest concern with the enactment and implementation of the legalization of recreational cannabis, especially as it relates to accidental ingestion by children and hazardous driving by users.

We are appreciative of the state's increased enforcement overseeing cannabis, and the work of the Illicit Cannabis Enforcement Task Force. We also support any and all inclusion and support for language related to Drugged Driving, that has been previously introduced in both houses, and any increased enforcement efforts.

In Conclusion

Every parent and family has a dream for their children. It is our mission 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 truly thank the legislature and Governor Hochul for this commitment to our students, and 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 Measure our Mission for Every Child, and make every child's potential a reality. No other work is more important.