



ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOL  
BUSINESS OFFICIALS

September 30, 2021

New York State Senate Education Committee  
New York State Senate NYC Education Committee  
New York State Senate Committee on Budget and Revenue  
Joint Public Hearing on Foundation Aid Increase and ARP Funds

A historic investment into public education highlighted the 2021-2022 Enacted State Budget. The additional state and federal aid, combined with a commitment to fully phase in the Foundation Aid formula, came as a relief to districts who had been preparing for a potential twenty percent reduction in state aid just weeks earlier. Throughout the pandemic, school districts have served as community hubs providing much-needed services to New Yorkers, such as providing meals, Wi-Fi internet hotspots, and childcare for first responders. We applaud the legislature for allocating funds to allow schools to continue in this mission.

Allocating the resources for school districts to continue and expand upon these services was the first step. ASBO New York's top priority is ensuring that school district leaders have the tools necessary to maximize the impact of these historic investments. Doing so requires deliberate planning, thoughtful implementation of programming, and thorough assessments of the effects of these investments. ASBO has worked with our membership and other stakeholders to provide best practices and tools to school district leaders to facilitate these processes.

While school business officials are well versed in the traditional budget requirements established in statute, the passage of the federal aid packages and 2021-2022 Enacted budget placed additional administrative obligations on districts seeking to access this aid. Working together with our sister organizations, the State Education Department and the Office of the State Comptroller, ASBO held a series of webinars and virtual town hall-style meetings to ensure the effective dissemination of information regarding new regulations throughout the state. These collaborative efforts also resulted in a series of Frequently Asked Questions documents that proved invaluable throughout the federal grant process.

As part of the new funding requirements, many school districts took additional steps to include local stakeholders in the planning regarding these new federal and state funds. By utilizing the guidance provided by the State Education Department, stakeholders, including parents, faculty, staff, school board members, and community members, were able to collaboratively identify student needs and determine the best strategy for their community. Districts took several approaches to ensure that all voices were heard in this process, including stakeholder meetings, public surveys, and town-hall-style meetings.

Upon completing this initial process, all school districts published their plans for the use of funds under the American Rescue Plan Act, and in some cases, increases in Foundation aid funding. In order to promote uniformity and transparency in these plans, ASBO released a template for school districts to use in publishing these plans. In addition, ASBO identified school districts subject to additional Foundation Aid reporting.

A vital component of the planning process was ensuring that school districts utilized these new funds to address local student needs resulting from the pandemic. While many similarities exist between communities, each school district needed the flexibility to address the needs of their specific student populations in the most effective way. ASBO and its members appreciate the efforts from both the federal and state governments to ensure that districts have the ability to make these decisions on the local level.

School districts have employed various strategies to address the needs of their students resulting from the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. These have included expanding summer school programming to all students, extended day learning programs, comprehensive after-school programs, hiring additional mental health staff, expanded student nutritional programs, and making investments in technology to ensure that learning extends beyond the physical classroom. This fall, we have seen districts provide additional in-person orientation and classroom walkthrough opportunities to help transition to the physical classroom learning environment.

To ensure that these funds have the desired impact on student needs, including learning outcomes, school district leaders have been utilizing various assessment tools and models. While specific assessment philosophies and implementation strategies differ, they generally select target populations, define success, identify comparison groups, collect segment/outcome data, map costs, evaluate program effectiveness, analyze cost-effectiveness, and draw conclusions. While these protocols have been in place for many districts as part of their annual budget process, the new requirements under the stimulus statutes emphasize their importance. As such, ASBO will be continuing our work to ensure that professional development programming on collaboration with curriculum development and implementation continues.

COVID-19 Relief funds were allocated to school districts through three different federal laws, the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES), the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Act. While CARES Act funds were used to supplant state aid cuts to school districts, CRRSA and ARPA funds are supplemental funds, providing additional resources to school districts. The allowable uses for these funds vary slightly across the three programs, though broadly, they can be used to prevent, prepare, and respond to COVID-19. Districts are permitted to use federal funds to hire and retain staff, invest in remote learning technologies, and improve classrooms to facilitate a return to in-person learning. The ARP Act did contain language requiring school districts to reserve at least 20 percent of their ARP allocation to address learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions.



ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOL  
BUSINESS OFFICIALS

The mechanisms by which the funds are accessed are the same for all three of the federal allocations. School districts were required to submit applications for these funds, detailing the planned use of the funds and how these expenditures met the requirements of the respective funding legislation. Once approved, school districts are provided a small portion of the funds upfront to reimburse costs already incurred; the remaining funds are distributed to school districts on a reimbursement basis.

These procedures can have the potential of impacting cash flow in districts as they create and expand these programs as we have outlined. While the significance of the investments made at both the federal and state level this year have helped to mitigate this, ASBO looks forward to the opportunity in future funding considerations to consider payment alternatives that can lessen this cash flow impact.

In order to maintain these programs and achieve the desired educational outcomes, school districts must have the resources needed. ASBO applauds the commitment by the state in their scheduled phase-in to fully fund Foundation Aid. We urge the legislature to remain vigilant and committed to this plan. By providing certainty to school districts regarding future funding levels, the state can ensure that communities can make necessary investments in staff and other programmatic resources without relying on nonrecurring funds.

While not the main focus of this hearing, it is important to note that while school districts continue to put all efforts into ensuring that students are able to maximize their educational experience, significant barriers remain. Specifically, the longstanding school bus driver shortage experienced throughout the state has been exasperated by the pandemic. We urge the legislature and executive to take all steps necessary to ensure that students have access to safe and reliable transportation to and from school.

We thank the New York State Senate Committees on Education, NYC Education, and Budget and Revenue for the opportunity to provide testimony before the joint committee. The actions taken by the legislature and executive to provide resources to our school districts this past year are greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with all of you to continue advancing public education throughout the state.