

TESTIMONY

of

**The New York State Association of
Small City School Districts**

for

**Joint Senate Standing Committees on Education, NYC Education and
Budget and Revenue**

**to review how school districts are spending Foundation Aid increases
and ARP funds**

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TESTIMONY

On behalf of the New York State Association of Small City School Districts, we welcome this opportunity to submit testimony.

In the brief time we have to present, we wish to focus on questions posed by this Joint Committee’s hearing notice. Small city school districts, as you are aware, are predominately comprised of high need students residing in low wealth communities. Our districts in “normal” times work within current law to provide the instructional, social-emotional and developmental services and activities to meet its and the State’s obligation to provide a meaningful high school education. Our students, families, staff and communities have been strongly and adversely impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Pre-pandemic our students faced notable barriers to their learning and success in school. These barriers were exacerbated by the pandemic. Specific concerns in the areas of reading and literacy, social/emotional systems and supports, attendance, restorative practices, curriculum alignment and articulation, AIS/academic/learning recovery and support, and equity are being addressed currently. We want to thank the Legislature for providing the much needed increase in Foundation Funding at this critical time.

Foundation Aid Increases

How has your school district engaged the school community in planning for use of these funds?

Districts have utilized online and mailed surveys to families, students and staff, social media, discussions at district parent meetings, forums and parent council meetings, school and district shared decision making meetings, as well as regular presentations at Board of Education meetings and postings on the districts websites.

How have these funds been applied to meet the specific needs of students as identified in the statutes?

Districts have concentrated on using the increased Foundation Aid to enhance student engagement, to improve attendance and to address student learning loss. This is being done by providing summer and afterschool programming, credit recovery programs, hiring or rehiring classroom teachers, hiring reading and mathematics intervention teachers, teaching assistants and paraprofessionals for support in the primary grades. Further, hiring counselors, school psychologists and social workers at the elementary, middle and high school levels for social-emotional and behavioral support and for outreach to engage families. Instructional coaches have been added to work with teaching staff at all levels to facilitate coherence to the instructional curriculum. Staff have also been hired to support Restorative Justice Practices and Dignity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives.

Technology devices have been purchased to support both in classroom learning and online learning at home. Infrastructure improvements have occurred to meet the evolving technological needs. Instructional software programs and upgrades have also been purchased.

Districts have also directed Foundation Aid funds for facilities upgrades, operations and maintenance particularly improving indoor air quality in classrooms and school buildings. Furniture purchases have occurred to enhance classroom and school environments and for new class sections.

What new or enhanced programs have been adopted or are planned to help students struggling academically, socially, emotionally?

Districts have invested in hiring counselors and social workers to respond to social-emotional-behavioral needs, create wellness programs and partnering with community agencies to address student mental health needs.

Initiatives have been made to create programs and activities for Dignity, Equity and Inclusion both in district or in partnership with the local BOCES.

As stated academically, districts have instituted summer school and after school programs, credit recovery programs and provided transportation through additional bus runs to make these opportunities accessible for all students.

How will your district assess the impact of these programs on student performance and their needs?

Districts will be utilizing both local and State assessments to assess students' present level of performance and to measure gains provided through the newly funded supports and initiatives. Districts will be monitoring and measuring individual students and groups of students who are involved in the newly implemented programs.

Student engagement will be measured through careful attendance monitoring on an aggregate and individual manner, in some cases on an every ten day interval. Monitoring student behavior generally and student behavioral incidents. Social-emotional baseline and periodically monitoring through social workers and counselors. Also, check-in-checkout programs with “at risk” students meeting with counselors and social workers.

What measurements will be used?

Local assessments for baseline, periodic and end of the year performance and State academic assessments at appropriate grade levels and courses.

Social-emotional inventories and tools are being employed.

How will this information be transmitted to parents?

Schools are sharing individual student performance information through progress monitoring information as a system with parents periodically, such as every five weeks. Information is communicated electronically and via mail. The parents of students with high needs, who are “at risk” or in crisis are contacted individually by school staff including classroom teachers, counselors, social workers and school psychologists. Schools continue to have in person parent conferences as health protocols permit.

Information on the use of the increased Foundation Aid Funds and the ARP will be shared through school and district newsletters to parents, posting on schools’ and the districts’ websites, social media, and periodic reports to the Board of Education at Public Meetings. Also, through reports to school and district shared decision making team meetings and parent conferences.

American Rescue Plan Funds

Our districts have utilized the same means to gather community stakeholder input for use of the American Rescue Plan Funds, as employed for gathering input for the increased Foundation Aid, Those being: online and mailed surveys to families, students and staff, held discussions at district parent meetings, forums and parent council meetings, school and district shared decision making meetings, as well as regular presentations at Board of Education meetings.

These ARP Funds have been used to benefit students by: investing in facility upgrades to improve indoor air quality, reducing transmission of virus transmission, and improving the classroom and school environment. Purchase of Personal Protective Equipment, air filters for various room capacities, facilities upgrades including electrical and HVAC work,

Increasing student teacher contact time through summer programming, after school programs, increasing transportation for student to attend summer and afterschool programs, STEM education programs, enriching programs to foster student learning and engagement, and enhancing equipment including multi-media in drama/theater, physical education and health

programs and hiring support staff including social workers and counselors to support student social-emotional and behavioral needs.

The impact of the programs will be measured through student attendance data, social-emotional inventories, local and state academic assessments, student grades and performance.

APPENDIX A: Partial List of Uses of 2021-22 Increased Aids

- purchasing necessary PPE
- purchasing air filters
- purchasing additional furniture such as tables and chairs to help with social distancing
- Flexible and adjustable desks/seating to accommodate shifts in needs for instruction and safety (physical distancing);
- Exploring ventilation
- Creating innovative and engaging learning spaces to align with preparing students for 2021 and forward
- rehiring positions lost previous year
- hiring positions that went unfilled last year
- hiring additional staff, i.e. social workers, to address student social/emotional needs
- Instructional Coaches to support teaching and learning (Literacy & Instruction Supports)
- Instructional specialists at the secondary level to support content delivery (Literacy & Instruction supports)
- Expansion of communication modalities for families and faculty/staff (Leadership/Communication & Parent Engagement))
- Restorative Practice Coordinators in the elementary schools and the Junior High (Social-Emotional supports);
- electrical work to provide additional lunch space to help with social distancing,
- iPad, chargers
- charging stations
- replacement technology to continue with 1 to 1 devices
- expanded summer programs
- offer a summer credit recovery for elementary, middle school and 9th grade
- provide instructional programs in the summer in Math and ELA, with transportation in order to insure attendance
- Partnership with Peaceful Schools to provide Tier 2 Counseling and supports (Social-Emotional Supports);
- Expansion of Social Emotional Learning programs and supports;
- Extended school year this past summer (over 500 students) (Literacy & Instruction support);
- Academic Intervention Services Teachers at each School (Literacy & Instructional Support)
- STEM Resources and Work Study (Literacy and Instruction)