

School Administrators Association of New York State

SAANYS
Government Relations

CYNTHIA GALLAGHER

Director of Government Relations

8 Airport Park Blvd. | Latham, NY 12110

Ph: 518-782-0600 | www.saanys.org

Testimony of the
School Administrators Association of New York State

Joint Hearing on the FY 2021-22

Executive Budget

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Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Weinstein, Chairperson Mayer, Chairperson Benedetto, honorable members of the Legislature and distinguished staff, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on funding for elementary and secondary education contained in the Executive Budget for the fiscal year 2022.

My name is Cynthia Gallagher and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). SAANYS is the largest state professional association of school administrators, whose membership has grown to nearly 8,000 school leaders from across the state. We represent members in school districts from Long Island to the most western, southern, and northern parts of our state. Additionally, SAANYS and the New York State Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA) have a longstanding coalition, which includes building and program leaders in all of the Big 5 districts, among many others, titled the New York State School Administrators Consortium (NYSSAC) to collaborate on advocacy and professional learning opportunities. On behalf of our members we want to thank you for your continued time, commitment, and support of public education.

At this time last year, we presented testimony in an environment quite different than the one we find ourselves in today. We began our remarks at that time by commenting on the results of a study indicating that principals and building administrators were the most trusted persons in their communities, placing above clergy and police. At that time, we had no idea on how important and well placed that trust would be. We are grateful that building administrators and program directors guided their school communities through the ravages of this pandemic and the heavy toll it has taken on New York State.

For the last part of the 2019-20 and first part of the 2020-21 school years, building administrators across the state have tackled situations for which they have had minimal training and little prior experience. They secured school buildings as they were shut down, implemented and coordinated intensive cleaning protocols, reimagined and restructured entire classrooms and the schools, developed remote, hybrid and in-person schedules based on constantly changing COVID-19 data, coordinated the delivery of meals and instructional devices to families, worked on daily health protocols, administered COVID testing and contact tracing, while also keeping the instructional programs afloat. I delineate these types of tasks because they directly relate to the proposed Executive Budget and the critical needs of the educational community.

Use of Fiscal Emergency Funds

It is important to remember that this is a budget hearing on the state's proposed budget and the appropriate use of state funds to support education, it is not a hearing on how to use a federal stimulus to offset drastic reductions in state aid. SAANYS is very cognizant of the horrendous fiscal situation in which New York is faced. While we recognize that in the proposed budget schools may see a \$2 billion increase (based on the final federal relief action), we must keep focused on the state's responsibility to education. The use of federal stimulus money should not obfuscate the millions of dollars that districts have spent over budget in dealing with the pandemic, on top of the existing \$4 billion owed to districts from not fully resourcing the foundation formula.

In prior budget years, the Gap Elimination Adjustment strategy was used to address the 2008 fiscal crisis. At that time, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds were used as a stopgap measure to address state budget deficits and it has taken almost five years

to come out from underneath the \$2.5 billion reduction in state aid. Using federal funds to balance state aid decreases resulted in a delayed fiscal cliff that did not sustain districts. We are fearful that the same type of fiscal strategy will result in a steeper drop off when federal funds are no longer forthcoming. We urge the legislature to use a more sustainable approach, which would allow schools to use a portion of the new Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental funds for their specific pandemic related costs, increase state aid above what is proposed and use alternate sources of revenue to shore up needed funding.

Foundation Aid

Regardless of the fiscal climate, a predictable foundation aid formula must be maintained. SAANYS has strongly expressed this position for several years. Schools understand the state's economic situation and have faced the distinct possibility that their aid could be reduced if relief funding is not provided, however, a stable formula is still needed. Setting aside the formula as has been the practice in recent years, has left schools at a real disadvantage as they are unable to develop realistic budgets on which the public is expected to vote. The consternation is only compounded this year as we try to analyze two proposed budgets based on two scenarios.

Service Aid

The Governor proposes once again to collapse and reduce expense-based aids. The new category is titled Service Aid and consolidates transportation, BOCES, Charter School high tax, supplemental public excess cost, academic enhancement and instruction material aids. The aid is capped at the 2021-22 level and has been decreased by \$700 million (backfilled using

federal dollars). SAANYS continues to oppose this strategy, as it negatively impacts districts with increased transportation costs and charter school costs.

Community School Set Aside

A continuing problem with Foundation Aid is that it is treated as a set-aside within foundation aid. There is no doubt that this funding is critical to school districts for addressing a wide range of needs including the increasing mental health needs of students. However, community schools funding is not available to all districts and should not be included as part of the Foundation Aid allocation. Foundation Aid is intended to be an unrestricted allocation to meet district needs as determined by the localities in which students reside. SAANYS continues to support delinking the Community Schools Set Aside from Foundation Aid

Special Education

Last year the state's share of (except NYC) special education costs related to district placements for students with disabilities were eliminated and maintenance costs for state operated schools for the blind and deaf was shifted to school districts. This was intended as a one-time occurrence and was expected to be repealed as of 4/1/21. The 2022 proposed budget would make these costs permanent. This is a substantive additional cost to districts and is opposed by SAANYS.

Professional Development

As stated earlier, the work of building administrators and program directors across the state have been expanded and turned inside out. The volume of work is relentless and just as with all first responders, they show up daily. Most of the work is in areas where they have had

minimal training. In order to understand the complex maze of new guidelines they are constantly searching for reliable information and training. In turn, they conduct turn-key training with the larger school community. SAANYS urges continued funding for the professional development of our building administrators. Last year we received \$475,000 in the budget and request that same level of allocation.

Funding for the Mental Health Resource and Training Center

SAANYS strongly supports the funding included in the proposed budget for the work of the Mental Health Resource and Training Centers. The pandemic is taking its toll on our students and providing support to address this expanding crisis is dramatically needed.

Pre-kindergarten

The Executive Budget continues funding for the state pre-kindergarten programs and SANYS continues to support this allocation of funding. This past year has highlighted how much work we will need to undertake to support families with young children in a post pandemic era. New York should regain its status as a national leader in early education as it moves to a stronger state when COVID-19 is behind us.

Paid leave for Vaccine Acquisition

The proposed budget would require all employers to provide up to four hours of paid leave to receive a vaccine. SAANYS would support this required time off in order to support the states goal to have between 70%-85% of the population vaccinated.

On behalf of the School Administrators Association of New York State, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on the proposed Executive Budget. Your consideration

to our requests and concerns is appreciated. We stand ready to be an active partner in improving the programs and services needed to support the students and schools of New York State.