

Conference of Big 5 School Districts



Buffalo ♦ New York City ♦ Rochester ♦ Syracuse ♦ Yonkers ♦ Utica

2015-16 STATE BUDGET PRIORITIES*

STATE AID – OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **A minimum increase of \$1.9 billion in education funding is needed.**

The Conference and the other members of the Educational Conference Board put forth a proposal calling for a \$1.9 billion increase in school aid which is in line with the New York State Board of Regents State Aid proposal requesting \$2 billion in additional funding.

New York State has a \$5 billion one-time surplus this year with its fiscal outlook showing significant improvement and revenue projections continuing to trend positively.

- **School Aid runs must be made available to school districts immediately.**

The Governor has taken the unprecedented step of refusing to include school aid formulas in his budget request and has withheld computer runs containing State Aid estimates. This has seriously hindered the ability of school districts to make reasonable revenue assumptions as they move forward with their local budget preparations.

- **School Aid increases should not be tied to State adoption of the Governor's reform agenda.**

The Executive Budget proposal mandates adoption of his Education Opportunity Agenda by March 31, 2015. If the State fails to enact the proposed reforms, any Statewide school aid increase would be withheld including aids for expense-based and reimbursable programs such as Building Aid, Transportation Aid, Special Services Aid for Big 5 career and technical education programs and reimbursable aids for special education programs and services.

74 Chapel Street, Albany, New York 12207

Tel: 518-465-4274

Big5@big5schools.org

STATE AID – SPECIFIC FUNDING REQUESTS

- **Student enrollment growth must be reflected in increased Foundation Aid.**

While public school enrollment Statewide is declining, the six member school districts of the Conference are experiencing growth in student enrollment which must be reflected in Foundation Aid increases.

- **Additional funding is necessary for English Language Learners.**

The New York State Board of Regents recently adopted additional regulatory requirements for school districts educating ELL student populations. Collectively, our member districts educate 72% of New York State's ELL students and the majority of pupils who are newly-arrived to the United States. Additional funding for more bilingual teachers, translators and support services is required.

- **Special Services Aid for Career and Technical Education must be increased and expanded.**

The New York State Board of Regents recently adopted Multiple Pathways to High School Graduation with the goal of expanding the delivery of career and technical education (CTE) and improving graduation rates. The Conference is requesting three specific changes to funding levels to expand CTE programs in concert with the new pathways: 1) increase the Special Services Aid per pupil formula-based funding cap of \$3,900; 2) extend Special Services Aid reimbursement to capture 9th grade students; and, 3) permit our component member district to access Special Services Aid to expand their in-district CTE programs.

- **School Health Services funding must be increased and expanded.**

Targeted school health funding for the Big 4 school districts has not been increased since the program's inception in 2006-2007. Student health and medical needs have grown significantly since such time as have programmatic requirements imposed on school health personnel. The Conference requests an increase in funding for the targeted school health program for our urban districts and an extension of the program to include the New York City and Utica City School Districts.

- **Charter school accountability standards and the charter school tuition formula must be adjusted. In addition, Charter School Transitional Aid must be expanded beyond three years for all school districts and further enhanced for school districts with high percentages of charter school pupils. Lastly, the charter school cap should be maintained and the supplemental tuition increase rejected until such time that the tuition formula and Charter School Transitional Aid formula are revised.**

The Conference recognizes charter schools as a public school parental choice option and calls for enhanced measures, linked to accountability requirements, to

ensure that charter school enrollment accurately reflects district pupil demographics such as ELL, special education and free and reduced price lunch students.

The current charter school funding formula is detrimental to school districts and must be amended. School districts' legacy costs, such as retiree health insurance premiums, should be removed from the calculation. The Conference also requests additional tiers of funding under Charter School Transitional Aid to capture more than three years and calls for enhancements to the formula for school districts with a high saturation of charter school pupils.

Furthermore, the proposed raising of the charter school cap and proposed increase to the supplemental basic per pupil tuition, which is on top of last year's adopted two-year increase, must both be rejected until the inequities of the funding formula are addressed.

ADDITIONAL BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Teacher and Principal Annual Professional Performance Reviews (APPRs) should be restructured by eliminating the local composite score and external evaluators must be locally decided and not an unfunded mandate.**

The Conference supports the Governor's proposal to eliminate the local component of the APPRs. However, we recommend the State composite score be revised to utilize student growth measures on State assessments as a school-wide metric for all building teachers and principals at 35%, not 50% as proposed in the Executive Budget. In doing so, greater equity and accountability would be built into the evaluations and less discrepancy would exist among school districts.

The Conference recommends that the remaining 65% of the evaluation score, which is based on other measures of performance, be more flexibly applied to permit local school districts discretion in utilizing external evaluators rather than mandating their use as originally proposed. This would preserve local decision-making and would be based upon availability of resources.

Adoption of local APPR plans should not be linked to school aid increases. If the State does link a statutory approval date to a school district's funding, we request a State-mandated APPR imposed safety net option.

- **Expedited removal of teachers should be postponed.**

It is premature to utilize APPR evaluations until it has been demonstrated that the APPR system is fair and reliable.

- **Additional funding is needed for ongoing professional development initiatives vital to implementation of the Common Core standards.**

We support additional resources for targeted teacher and principal training and professional development initiatives. These resources are particularly critical given the loss of Race to the Top funds.

- **The Executive proposal for State takeover of failing schools and school districts must be rejected.**

The State has failed to adequately fund our high need school districts, however, student achievement in these districts continues to improve. Furthermore, there is no data indicating that State takeover would yield any additional improvements in student outcomes.

- **The Executive's proposal allowing school districts to seek regulatory relief in special education services must be enacted.**

Nearly 50% of the State's special education students (ages 5-21) are educated in our districts. The waiver system proposed by the Governor would provide much needed mandate relief to school districts while ensuring that students receive necessary services.

*Based on the 2015-16 Executive Budget Proposal