

NYS PTA Response to NYS Adopted Budget

On Monday, April 4, school districts received their state aid allocations according to the final vote by the NYS Senate on Friday, April 1. The following is an overview of funding issues that NYS PTA advocated for, with what was included in budget bills and what was not addressed.

Additionally, we pinpoint certain items we believe will be discussed through the end of the legislative session in June. Your continued attention to advocacy efforts and our advocacy messages is important. During this session, many last minute issues were responded to with our Educational Conference Board (ECB) partners in response to concerns from our constituencies. This is why we ask you to keep alert for our action alert emails and news items regarding letters we have collaborated on now through June.

Issues:

Increased support for public schools through increased Foundation Aid; removal of GEA (Gap Elimination Assessment) and other state aid sources.

Total aid allocated to education was close to \$1.5 billion in additional school aid, representing a 6% increase over 2015-16 levels and the largest school aid increase since the 2008-09 school year. Over \$1.4 billion is comprised of increased Foundation Aid, full elimination of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) and full funding of expense-based aids. (Expense-based aid is paid to districts as reimbursement for district expenditures during the previous year for items like transportation, textbook, library media, and capital aid, as seen on the district "run.") While a healthy increase in total school aid, \$1.5 billion falls short of the Regents and ECB requests for a \$2.2-2.4 billion increase that would promote equity among high, moderate and low wealth districts to help overcome the impact of a low tax levy limit of .12 this year.

While the GEA has been totally and forever eliminated in law, there will still be a final restoration of \$434 million to mainly moderate and high wealth districts.

- The Foundation Aid increase of \$646 million went to lower wealth and city districts. That included \$100 million for 225 districts designated as low performing to establish and expand Community Schools. Community Schools incorporate health and social services, afterschool programs and community partnerships all aimed at improving the family supports needed to improve student success. An additional \$75 million in Community Schools aid was allocated to districts with the lowest performing schools.

There is an outcry to revisit the Foundation Formula and begin again to phase in the scheduled \$3.8 billion aid increases in an equitable manner, as mandated by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement.

- State funds of \$54.8 million were allocated to charter schools to increase the per pupil basis and provide a more generous facilities aid formula for charter schools in New York. Unfortunately, there were no changes relating to transparency and accountability in the adopted budget language.
- The enacted budget provides a \$22 million grant to create half-day and full-day pre-kindergarten programs for three-year olds. Preschool aid was provided only to establish 3-year-old programs; there was no inclusion of aid for the remaining school districts that do not have full-day kindergarten. ***We need continued advocacy for our NYS PTA early childhood position on mandating and funding full-day kindergarten***

programs. During tight fiscal times with low tax cap budgeting, local districts may seek to alter or even eliminate their kindergarten program in the absence of this mandate.

Two Cautionary Items

1. While this total increase in aid is laudable, it may not be sufficient for the over 80 school districts with a below 0 tax levy limit. When you attend your local school budget meetings, listen carefully to the improved aid picture and the implications on your local tax levy. Some districts may need a supermajority vote (60% + 1) to have a tax increase of 0, due to the calculations required by law.
2. Receipt of state aid increases of 2015-2016 and state aid allocations for 2016-2017 may be at risk if a school district does not have a state-approved 3012d APPR plan by September 1, 2016. *The 3012d APPR plan enacted last year in the Education Transformation Act requires educator evaluation according to a matrix of student growth on state assessment and observations only, and the language includes the ability to withhold funding should a mutually agreed upon plan not be approved by September 1.* There is precedent because the Governor has withheld funding for NYC for failing to meet the original deadline for APPR plans.

NYS PTA urges its members to continue to advocate that the Governor and legislature eliminate this penalty by de-coupling APPR from school aid during the Regents 4-year moratorium on the use of grade 3-8 assessment scores in educator evaluations. Keep watching for advocacy alerts as this issue continues to evolve.

Combatting Heroin and Prescription Opioid/Opiate Abuse

One of NYS PTA's key Lobby Day messages called for the funding and development of programs, facilities and advocacy initiatives to combat the devastating impact of heroin and prescription opioid/opiate abuse on families and communities across the state. While falling short of the funding level we have advocated for, the 2016-17 state budget takes some steps to address the problem by providing:

- an additional \$25 million of funding for much-needed prevention, treatment and recovery services;
- an allocation of \$30 million (from a \$200 million health care facility fund) that will support relevant community-based organizations, many certified by the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS);
- another \$10 million in funds for OASAS for capital projects related to chemical dependency, prevention, treatment and recovery services; and
- an additional \$2 million for school-based substance abuse prevention programs in NYC.

Issues that remain:

- At this writing the Office of Family and Community Engagement has not received the \$25 million support for which NYS PTA advocated . We did see approval of \$20 million of Federal monies to support the proposal by Regent Lester Young for an initiative called, "Success of Boys and Young Men of Color". Within the general plan shared at the December Board of a Regents meeting, there was an allocation of \$350,000 for family

engagement activities. Once further details are shared at the April Board of Regents meeting, we should be better able to guide our advocacy efforts.

- Education Tax Credits, also known as the Parental Choice Option, was not enacted during budget negotiations. We expect this issue to arise again with pending bills during this legislative session. Keep an eye on this issue, which like charter school funding, may be enacted with little notice.
- The legislature adjusted school safety legislation to include emergency drills in the fire drill count during the school year, further limited public access to emergency plans, and eliminated the mandate for a student on the safety committee. A student may serve on the committee but is barred from access to the actual plan language.
- As you may have heard, a phase-in of increases to minimum wage and employee paid family leaves was enacted.

Regents and NYSED

The next board of Regents meeting is scheduled for April 18-19, when Chancellor Rosa will preside. Materials should be available by Friday April 15, and we expect to hear more about the budget initiatives, standards review process, ongoing implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act and Pathways discussions.