



New York State
School Boards
Association

Legislative Priorities *2021*





Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York State is facing the bleakest economic outlook since the Great Depression. Our school leaders are confronting a grim reality of budget cuts amidst new and increasing needs and constantly evolving instructional models— from in-person, to remote, to hybrid.

Meanwhile, the ability of individual districts to meet the challenges brought on by the pandemic is uneven, based on a variety of circumstances, including geography, district wealth and student need. In addition to the stress caused by the pandemic, our nation is facing a call to action to ensure that all of our children grow up in a world filled with opportunity and justice, rather than hostility and fear. Education equity must be prioritized now more than ever before.

New York's public school districts educate more than 2.5 million students every day.

The 5,000 school board members who help lead the more than 700 districts and BOCES that serve those students believe strongly in the mission of the state's public education system. Public school districts offer diverse options to parents that maximize student outcomes for success and assure every child is prepared for college, careers and citizenship. Public schools are proud of their responsibility to educate and prepare students of all backgrounds and circumstances in every corner of the state.

It is time to find creative solutions to ease the myriad pressures on school leaders and provide more flexibility and support to our students, staff and school administrators as they reexamine what learning will look like in a drastically changed environment, in both the year to come and the foreseeable future.



Commitment to Equity

NYSSBA recognizes that the current education playing field is not level for all students. NYSSBA also understands the value of engaging in difficult conversations involving race, gender and cultural diversity. Our state faces various hurdles that it must address in order to improve educational equity for all students. The teaching and administrative workforce must diversify so that students are

exposed to role models of different races and backgrounds, and district-wide decisions are made with consideration of various viewpoints. Public funds must be allocated equitably to ensure equal opportunities for all students. We call on all policymakers to consider the impacts the legislation they propose and the budgetary decisions they make have on equity in education.



POSITION: The New York State School Boards Association shall take a leadership role in encouraging school boards to develop successful strategies for integrating respect for cultural differences into the educational experience. In carrying out this mission, NYSSBA shall:

- a. Encourage school boards to ensure that the importance of acceptance of others who are unique and different because of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, disability and religiously related reasons is part of the curriculum.
- b. Encourage school boards to invite discussion among students, parents, staff and the community regarding how hatred and bigotry based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and religion endanger the pluralistic and diversity principles for which this nation stands.
- c. Encourage school boards to involve students, parents, staff and the community in developing and supporting education which invites understanding and acceptance of others' differences and which aims to eradicate hatred and bigotry.



NYSSBA's 2021 Calls to Action

STUDENT SERVICES AND NEEDS

Access to Technology and the Digital Divide

The COVID-19 pandemic forced public schools across the state to make a dramatic shift from classroom to virtual instruction, whether by providing completely remote instruction or a hybrid model. Research indicates that between 15 and 17 million students nationwide have inadequate online access in order to properly engage in virtual learning platforms. According to a report produced by Common Sense in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group, 27% of students and 9% of teachers in New York State have inadequate connection to the Internet. This greatly impedes school districts' efforts to properly meet the academic, social and emotional needs of students when physically unable to educate them in person, and results in great educational inequities among students.

There are countless reasons school districts may choose to move classes online. A global pandemic is just one. Many rural districts struggle to provide competitive course offerings to their students. Expanding options to include an array of online courses could expose students to a world of opportunities. Online learning can also promote collaboration. Students throughout New York could partner with each other to research the next breakthrough in medical science. Foreign language students could build lasting relationships with their peers internationally.

Broadband must be expanded so that students throughout New York State are granted the opportunity to access high-speed internet. There cannot be true equity in our education system when certain students are forced to bring their Chromebooks to parking lots to do a day's worth of homework in a car, while other students sit behind desks in their rooms free of distraction.

Additionally, the state and federal government must invest in a multi-billion dollar increase to programs that provide necessary funding for school districts to support distance and remote learning for students who don't have proper broadband access at home. It is critical that such funds cover a wide range of expenses including Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, connected devices, at-home internet devices for students and other advanced information and technology services.

Student Health and Mental Health

Managing a school in the 21st century has expanded greatly beyond meeting the academic needs of students. In order to be successful, children need to be healthy, well-nourished and nurtured. Over the course of the last decade, school district leaders have increasingly provided school-based health and mental health services,



as well as other community-based programs. Even when school facilities are closed, schools continue to provide nonacademic services either virtually or by means of complex, costly delivery services.

New York has over 250 approved and operating school-based health centers whose services not only improve students' overall health and mental health, but also lead to fewer absences and improved academic performance. These centers are even more critical during a global pandemic. Many routine healthcare visits have been put on pause, and districts will have to respond to more critical mental health needs. Anxiety, depression and suicide rates were on the rise before schools closed. Now, additional factors must be considered, including social isolation, anxiety caused by COVID-19 and grief over the death of family members.

In addition, the tobacco and electronic cigarette industries have worked hard to influence a new generation of users. Once thought to be the generation that would destroy the tobacco industry, new products have entered the market targeted at today's youth. These products have encouraged young people to pick up tobacco products for the first time. To protect our children from a lifetime of nicotine addiction and poor health outcomes, the state must take further action to regulate and restrict the use of tobacco and e-cigarette products.

NYSSBA calls on the state and federal governments to adequately fund programs

that support students' physical and mental health. That includes funding for community schools (not Foundation Aid set-asides) and dedicated funding for school-based health and mental health services, including infrastructure. Further, NYSSBA calls on the state and federal government to protect Medicaid payments to school districts.

School Nutrition

During the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts have continued to ensure students across the state have access to nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and sometimes even dinners during this time of transition from cafeteria service to grab-and-go meal pick-up and delivery models.

School food authorities are experiencing budget shortfalls for a number of reasons, including transportation costs of delivery services, increased costs due to packaging, provision of hazard pay for food service employees and loss of anticipated revenue from a la carte food items.

NYSSBA calls for increased investments in school nutrition programs on both the state and federal level, and continued flexibility for meal delivery to ensure all students have continued access to nutritional meals.

Pathways to Graduation

School districts across the state are preparing students to be competent in the soft and hard skills necessary to be successful in either college or the workforce. Assessing that competency is not always as simple as administering a standardized exam. Portfolios, also referred to as performance-based assessments, can be a more authentic



way to reveal what students understand and have learned throughout the year. NYSSBA encourages the New York State Board of Regents to provide local school boards the flexibility to choose the most appropriate medium for assessing their students.

Awarding districts greater authority to determine graduation and diploma requirements is especially critical today as our districts face unprecedented closures, virtual learning challenges and disrupted education. Each school district has created its own unique plan to address student needs, both academic and non-academic, during the pandemic. It is only appropriate to also provide them the flexibility to set graduation requirements to meet the exceptional needs their students and teachers are currently facing.

NYSSBA calls for the state to provide local school districts greater latitude to choose, from an array of options, a set of graduation requirements they believe will best demonstrate their students' academic competencies. Additionally, we request an option of modified requirements for students completing a BOCES career or technical education program and the reinstatement of the Regents Competency Tests.

Additionally, recognizing the value of a wider variety of student opportunities, NYSSBA calls on the state to continue and grow investments in P-TECH and other early college high school programs, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and other initiatives that allow for project-based learning.

Finally, it is well past time for the state to agree to increase the aidable cap on BOCES salaries for career and technical education instructors. Such programs grow student interest and provide a worthy path to successful employment for thousands of students. The cap has been in place for nearly three decades and must be adjusted to allow for full participation in these programs. At the same time, a proportionate increase in special services aid should be made for similar CTE programs in the Big 5 and other non-component districts.

School Safety

NYSSBA does not believe there is a one-size-fits-all solution for addressing school safety. Some communities may choose to have a school resource officer employed by a law enforcement agency assigned to one or more of their school buildings. Another district may feel better served by a security officer or team that is not affiliated with law enforcement, but rather selected and hired by the district. Others may determine their greatest need is to provide mental health services, while yet others may focus on security systems, access and hardening of entrances. While the options vary, one thing remains true: each will best serve students if adopted with local stakeholder input and support.

NYSSBA calls on state and federal policymakers to make available flexible grant funding to support the development and implementation of school safety programs.



Changing Student Enrollment

The profile of the students many districts are educating is changing. The students showing up in classrooms today are increasingly poorer, more likely to have experienced trauma, more likely to have special education needs and more likely to need mental health supports. Regardless of the number of students a district has, it may be far more expensive to educate them than it was in the past.

For example, the number of English language learner (ELL) students currently totals nearly a quarter million statewide. In a functional, updated Foundation Aid formula, ELL students and their educational needs would be accounted for.

But these districts need financial assistance from the state now and cannot afford to wait for hopeful reforms to school aid formulas.

School districts throughout the state are also experiencing consistent growth among students who need more than basic academic programs to be successful. Almost half a million public school students in New York State are categorized as receiving special education services. Data on students who may have had interruptions in their formal education or are in need of mental health services are harder to quantify, but indicators point to a growing crisis in our schools. It is important that students receive all the services they need.

As districts balance the collective needs of their communities, NYSSBA calls on the state to support school districts and the students they serve through relief from service mandates that go beyond federal requirements, or meaningful increases in funding to offset the substantial growth in these areas.



EDUCATION RESOURCES

State Aid

School districts are facing a fiscal and budgetary challenge that few could have imagined, with potential state aid losses that would dwarf those endured during, and immediately following, the Great Recession a decade ago.

For many districts, the recovery from the multi-billion dollar Gap Elimination Adjustment had offered the opportunity to think optimistically about the next generation of K-12 education. While school districts worked diligently to address the ever-growing needs of their students, they were able to do so in an environment that saw state aid to schools increase by more than 35% from 2012-13 to 2019-20.

Conversations about school finance began to focus on how to effectively fund and improve the nearly decade and a half old Foundation Aid formula. But instead of continuing important work on the issue of funding equity, the education community must now grapple with the prospect of a state aid reduction in the billions of dollars, thousands of staff layoffs and the devastating loss of critical programs, services and academic opportunities for students.

Upon enactment of the 2020-21 state budget, which included the authority to institute mid-year funding reductions, school districts were almost immediately warned about the potential for a 20% cut to state aid. Such a reduction would result in a loss of more than \$5 billion statewide, knocking education funding back to levels not seen since 2014-15 - a time when today's high school

seniors were beginning sixth grade. For the vast majority of districts, such a cut simply cannot be handled through use of standard budgeting tools. These cuts would mean real, significant and heartbreaking actions.

While this is the financial reality that many industries are facing, it does not mean that the needs that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have simply gone away. In many cases, they have been intensified. At the same time, new challenges have emerged. It may be unrealistic to assume that all pain can be avoided, but it is critical that education be made a priority. Our children get one shot at kindergarten, one opportunity to experience all that elementary school has to offer and one chance for high school to prepare them for the rest of their adult lives.

More than ten years after the Foundation Aid formula was enacted, with well-deserved promise, school districts are still unable to depend on a functioning operating aid formula. Foundation Aid remains billions of dollars below full funding for the overwhelming majority of districts in the state. A Foundation Aid freeze, coupled with the potential for further state aid reductions and added costs due to COVID-19, further exacerbates this monumental challenge.

School districts need a state aid system that is dependable, predictable and responsive to the existing educational environment, with minimal manipulation by



political processes. The further school districts are detached from such a system, the harder it is to return. And while Foundation Aid makes up the majority of traditional state aid, school districts rely on a wide variety of state funding mechanisms. Whether it be improved tuition methodologies for special act districts, expense-based aids that serve as reimbursements for previously incurred costs or high tax aid for districts unusually dependent on property taxes, school districts will continue to depend on the state to maintain proper funding of these categories. In some cases, these formulas must also be re-examined and adjusted to meet the unique circumstances faced during the pandemic.

We are in the middle of what is already one of the greatest fiscal challenges in our state's history. We must not let it also turn into one of the greatest educational tragedies. Education funding must be an absolute priority.

Federal Aid

The ability of individual districts to meet the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic is uneven, based on a variety of circumstances, including geography, district wealth and student need. This has led to an even stronger focus on the role the federal government can play in helping to ensure states and local school districts have the resources they need to meet the educational, physical and social needs of their students. The federal budget must prioritize these needs.

NYSSBA calls for federal support as school districts continue to navigate the financial, health and safety realities of COVID-19. At the same time, the federal budget must maximize investments in Title I grants for disadvantaged students, Title II grants to support professional development and Title IV grants to support a variety of academic programs. It is critical that federal Medicaid payments also be protected.

NYSSBA further calls for a significant increase in federal funding to support special education programs and services, working towards the 40% funding commitment that the federal government made to states when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted in 1975. While overall federal funding levels are small when compared to state and local support, the dollars help ensure school district budgets work, particularly for districts with the most needy students.

The federal government is also uniquely positioned to help school districts across the state — and, indeed, the nation — meet the technology inequities that have been highlighted and intensified by COVID-19. Access to broadband must be a national priority. NYSSBA calls for a significant increase to the E-rate program, which disseminates funds to schools and libraries for the purchase of connected devices and advanced information and technology services within their facilities. NYSSBA also calls for an expansion of E-rate eligible purchase to include home internet access to all students.





PRINCIPLES

NYSSBA's positions on school funding are guided by **five main principles:**

Adequacy – to provide sufficient resources to assure the opportunity for a sound basic education for all students.

Equity – to distribute a foundation level of state aid for every student that is based on the actual cost of providing a sound basic education that fairly compensates for differences in community costs, needs and resources. The Legislature should preclude municipalities from using state aid to replace local education resources.

Flexibility – to increase the percentage of operating aid so that boards of education retain the discretion to determine what educational programs best address local needs. Local communities should not be restrained from determining the level of funding they will expend to support educational programs.

Predictability – to provide timely passage of the state budget and stable funding distributed through a consistent, uniformly applied formula that would not require annual manipulation by the Legislature and that would facilitate long-term planning by school districts.

Clarity – to establish a funding formula that is easily explained and understood.



Finally, federal action to limit the income tax deduction for state and local taxes (SALT) compounds many of the funding challenges that school districts are facing. In high cost states like New York, the \$10,000 SALT deduction cap potentially impacts millions of taxpayers. The SALT cap can threaten the passage of general school district budgets, as well as bond approval for capital construction projects. The SALT cap must be repealed.

Local Revenue

More than half of school district spending statewide is provided by local revenue, the majority of which is generated through property taxes. School boards strive to balance restraint in property tax growth with their mission to deliver the programs and services their students need in order to thrive in an ever-changing world. The extreme fiscal challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic have further exposed the bluntness of the tax cap, as school districts have little ability to adjust for loss of state aid, new cost increases or changing educational environments. Since the enactment of the property tax cap in 2011, school boards have been forced to adjust their budgeting practices to first fit the constraints of the tax cap, instead of placing the greatest priority on the needs of their school districts and students.

While the property tax cap's sunset clause was repealed in 2019, there was unfortunately

little action taken to address the inequities and unintended consequences the cap created when it was established a decade ago. These difficulties still exist and have only compounded over time.

In order to make the property tax cap work for all stakeholders, NYSSBA continues to seek action on the following reforms:

- Make the allowable growth factor a minimum of 2%;
- Prohibit negative tax caps;
- Include properties under payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) agreements in the tax base growth factor;
- Reform the tax cap override process;
- Account for enrollment growth in the calculation.

The complexities of the property tax cap are only part of the problem. School districts have also experienced an increasing prevalence of PILOT deals and other economic development tax incentives. Nearly 500 districts reported receiving PILOTs in 2017-18 alone.

Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) routinely offer PILOTs and other tax abatement deals to encourage economic development. PILOT agreements generally reduce the amount of property tax revenue that would have otherwise been received by school districts and other local governments. In addition, these incentives have an initial negative impact on a district's tax cap calculation.



In some cases, IDAs actively engage potentially affected school districts in their processes and offer great openness and transparency. However, too often there is little to no communication, leaving the school district to learn of a multi-million dollar impact on its budget after a decision has already been made. State law specifically lists school board members as potential members of IDA boards, but only a handful of the more than 100 IDAs statewide have school board representation.

NYSSBA calls for continued reforms to the PILOT process in order to promote greater communication, openness and transparency. School boards should have representation on IDA boards and/or the authority to disallow such tax deals from applying to school property taxes.

Budget Management

Balancing the need for strong academic programs with keeping local property taxes stable and affordable is one of a school board's most important responsibilities. The state made some notable progress in recent years by authorizing a Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) reserve within the existing state and local retirement system (ERS) reserve fund. This flexibility is likely to prove useful in the near term, as pandemic-related market volatility is likely to lead to contribution rate increases for school districts. But additional barriers remain.

Increasing Fund Balance and Reserve Fund Flexibility

Fund balance is the amount of operating funds that districts may retain at the end of a fiscal year. Currently, districts may carry over a maximum of just 4% per year.

Any amount in excess of 4% must be used to offset property taxes or be placed in an authorized "reserve fund," to be restricted for specific future expenses.

For school districts, fund balances are heavily restricted by these rules. In contrast, local governments have no specific percentage limitation on fund balances. However, the Government Finance Officers Association recommends that local governments — including school districts — maintain no less than two months' worth of operating expenses on hand. This is significantly higher than school districts' current limit.

Coupled with the property tax cap, these burdensome restrictions further reduce districts' abilities to meet the needs of students. Moreover, a low fund balance is one factor given by the Office of the State Comptroller that indicates poor financial health. The current restrictions leave little room for error for districts to achieve this critical metric necessary to indicate good financial health. A higher cap would allow districts to retain more cash on hand to meet their future fiscal obligations. At a time when the economic future is incredibly uncertain, this would be a means



of allowing districts to better meet the financial challenges that are on the horizon.

Likewise, additional reserve fund usage options must be given to school districts. This includes the authority to pull from both capital and operating reserve funds in order to meet the needs of the current economic crisis. Legislation enacted this past session would allow for some of this flexibility. However, this law requires repayment of borrowed funds, plus interest. NYSSBA believes strongly that additional flexibility should be offered.

Cost Drivers

At a time when the prospect of additional revenue is low, it is critical that the state partners with school districts to identify meaningful ways to reduce costs and curb the growth of high-expense areas.

Reforming the Triborough Amendment

The Triborough Amendment is a state law that prohibits employers from discontinuing the provisions of a collective bargaining agreement once it expires if a new contract has not been negotiated. Notably, this requires any incremental salary increases to continue to be paid, unless or until a new contract is agreed upon.

The structure of the Triborough Amendment causes a number of challenges that can mean added fiscal stress and reduced flexibility for

school districts. First, it requires districts to pay for expired contractual obligations, whether they can afford to or not. This, in turn, can create a disincentive to negotiate new agreements.

The Triborough Amendment can be even more restrictive in today's environment. COVID-19 has placed unprecedented fiscal strain on local governments, including school districts. It has also disrupted the normal administrative processes of districts for months.

It is yet unknown how deeply school districts will be impacted by the economic downturn. The state has suggested cuts to school aid are likely to be in the billions. This has already led districts to have to consider difficult decisions such as layoffs and furloughs to manage expenses. Salary and benefit expenses currently make up approximately 70% of most school district budgets. In this uncertain environment, requiring districts to continue funding expired contract provisions is unnecessarily burdensome.

Reforming the Triborough Amendment would provide immediate and much needed fiscal flexibility to our state's school districts. It would provide districts more predictability in the budget process in a very unpredictable environment. It would also allow for potential cost savings at a time when many districts badly need additional funding to provide even basic services. Any reform could still preserve the benefits included in the amendment, such as health coverage.

NYSSBA calls on the Governor and the State Legislature to reform the Triborough Amendment in a way that appropriately acknowledges the



needs and circumstances for both school districts and their staff.

Reforming the Wicks Law

The Wicks Law is a requirement that school districts hire up to four separate prime contractors for school construction projects. These are a general contractor, an electrical contractor, a plumbing contractor and an HVAC (heating, ventilation and cooling) contractor.

Standard construction projects are done with a general contractor that chooses electrical, plumbing, and HVAC subcontractors as needed. School districts are held to a different and unnecessary standard. To make the situation more challenging, because each contractor is acting independently, they are free to stop their work to focus on other projects. This hinders the various contractors from consistently coordinating their work on school projects. As a result, the remaining contractors have to stop work until the others return to the job site.

Capital projects are expensive and paying four separate contractors often eliminates any economies of scale. Additionally, districts are also required to pay prevailing wage to each separate contractor for all capital projects. The cost increases to districts generated by the Wicks Law are consistently estimated to be between 20% and 30%. This expense is then passed on to both local taxpayers and the state in the form of increased property tax rates and increased building aid, respectively. The final outcome of these requirements is significant cost increases coupled with a loss of productivity.

In addition to its inefficiency, the law is outdated. The original goal of the Wicks Law was to ensure timely payment of subcontractors by their general contractors. However, this original intent has been lost and replaced by a costly mandate on school districts. Every other state in the country has repealed its similar law in favor of more sensible policies.

The economic consequences of COVID-19 demonstrate the need to repeal the Wicks Law. It is difficult enough for school districts to budget and to obtain qualified bids for capital projects under normal conditions. Already fiscally stressed school district budgets now face massive revenue shortfalls made worse by an unpredictable economy. To hold districts to this burdensome mandate under these conditions is detrimental to both students and taxpayers.

Special Education

School districts spend billions of dollars each year on special education services. Costs for these services have increased by more than 30% over the past decade. Much of this increase is driven by special education enrollment growth. Nearly one in five students now qualifies for special education services. These services are important, but also costly, and local school districts are required to absorb the overwhelming majority of the expense. While additional resources could help offset these costs, that is not a long-term solution.



Of particular importance are the costs generated by the astounding increase seen in special education-related lawsuits. These lawsuits have become increasingly common in recent years. Many of the suits stem from a due process hearing, in which parents request a reevaluation of their child's Individualized Education Program. Frequent and frivolous lawsuits have been on the rise, costing districts unnecessary time and money.

This is complicated by the fact that current federal law places the burden of proof on the district against which a claim is being made. This means that the burden lies with the defendant, reversing the normal practice

for most other legal proceedings in which the burden falls on the plaintiff. Additionally, it is also difficult for school districts to recover attorneys' fees in suits where the district is successful.

Districts have no desire to deny students the services that they require, under their constitutionally protected right to an education. At the same time, they have an obligation to students and families, who are also taxpayers, to ensure that all the current requirements are met while delivering services efficiently. NYSSBA believes the state should take steps to address the underlying drivers pushing the cost of special education upward.



LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT

Regional High Schools

The state should examine expanding the existence of regional high schools. In this model, students attend elementary and middle schools in their local community, then attend a regionalized facility at the secondary level.

According to one BOCES district superintendent, regional high schools “allow schools and communities to maintain their identity, expand educational opportunities, and achieve financial savings,” which may be more appealing to certain communities than the traditional merger model. NYSSBA recommends legislative changes to allow for school districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) across the state to establish regional high schools in order to allow for operational and educational efficiencies, while maintaining communities’ interest in their local schools.

Flexible School Days

COVID-19 has reshaped how school boards must envision day-to-day learning. In order to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the State Department of Health and the State Education Department recommended school districts adopt myriad new protocols, including staggered scheduling and virtual learning platforms. The weight of the community’s health and safety lies on the shoulders of our school board members and it is a responsibility they do not take lightly.

Many current learning platforms include a hybrid of in-person and online classes. As such, school districts must be granted greater flexibility in determining their school calendars and organizing their students’ instructional days.

Under current law, school districts are required to hold at least 180 instructional days, or an hourly equivalent, between September 1 and Regents Rating Day in late June. If they fail to do so, they risk losing state aid. NYSSBA calls on the state to provide flexibility to begin the academic year earlier than September 1 if that is what district leaders choose is best for their students and communities.

As the future of learning changes, both the school day and school year may look different from how it has looked in the past. School districts need the guidance and flexibility to be able to adapt to the needs of today and meet the needs of tomorrow.

Schools as Polling Places

School boards are publicly elected by their communities to provide governance and oversight for their districts. NYSSBA believes strongly in preserving and protecting the authority of school boards. As part of that responsibility, it is important for policymakers to give school districts greater control over access to their students and buildings. Currently, county boards of elections can require school districts to open their doors for any election – general, primary and special.



When selected, school districts have no recourse, regardless of the potential impact on school operations or student and staff safety.

At a time when school districts are forced to make costly investments to maintain strict health and security standards for their students and staff, it is distressing to think that they may be required to increase the number of days that they must set aside such procedures and allow unrestricted access to their buildings. Furthermore, the

Department of Health requires school districts to conduct health screenings, including temperature checks, of all visitors that walk through school doors. It is unacceptable to burden school administrators with this additional logistic hurdle at a time when simply educating students has become a monumental challenge.

NYSSBA calls on the state to allow boards of education to determine whether or not school district buildings are used as polling places.



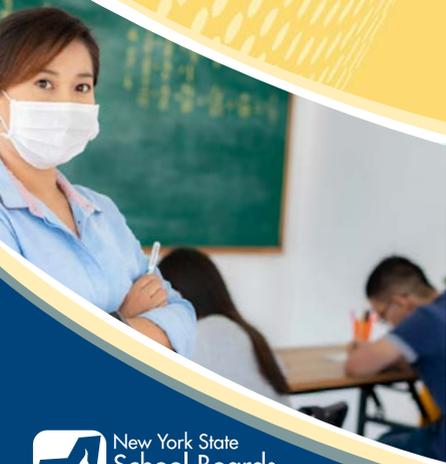


The New York State School Boards Association

believes that proposals affecting public education should:

- provide **access** to programs that prepare students to be college and career ready;
- **achieve** equity and adequacy in funding;
- promote **efficiency** and cost-effectiveness;
- advance high **expectations** for all students;
- embrace **innovative** approaches and assessments; and
- foster **community** engagement and regional cooperation.





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