



2025 NYSSBA Budget Priorities

School Aid

- Support executive proposal to provide a \$1.46 billion increase in Foundation Aid
- Support crucial minimum increase for all districts, accounting for annual cost pressures
- Support proposed updates to student poverty data in the Foundation Aid formula
 - Continue with additional formula revisions in the near term
- Support full-funding of expense-based reimbursement aids (\$230 million increase)
- Reject proposal to freeze/cap state aid payments based on the November database

Universal School Meals

- Support proposal to provide for truly universal school meals for all students in all districts
- Benefits include relief for families, reliable access to nutrition for students across all income levels, reduction in socio-economic stigma, and more streamlined administrative processes

Student Use of Smart Devices

- Support the Governor's focus on the mental health needs of students
 - NYSSBA has held multiple sessions and distributed other supportive materials, to ensure that schools have all the resources necessary to make informed decisions
- Reject proposal for a statewide blanket bell-to-bell prohibition on the use of smart devices
 - Allow districts and BOCES to adopt policies that reflect the needs and priorities of their local communities
- Proposed \$13.5 million allocation may be insufficient to meet needs of all districts/BOCES

Zero-Emission Buses

- Despite some positive adjustments over the past year, the transition as currently required is not achievable for a significant number of districts
 - Rockefeller Institute report on Foundation Aid recommended the state fully cover the transition costs for districts
- Until or unless the timeline is altered or repealed, NYSSBA joins the Educational Conference Board (ECB) to issue nine specific recommendations, including:
 - State-funded district-specific fleet implementation plans
 - Require utilities to provide specialized rate structures for school districts and contractors
 - Allow for hybrid or low-emission buses for districts facing additional challenges

Career and Technical Education

- Increase the aidable salary cap for BOCES instructors from \$30k to at least \$60k
 - Increase can be phased-in over multiple years, with no state cost in 2025-26
- Increase special services aid proportionately for non-component districts
- CTE programs have strong interest and have proven highly effective in helping provide students with the essential skills they require to successfully transition to college and career

Prior Year Aid Claims

- Restore annual funding (approximately \$20 million) to make payments against the outstanding prior year aid claims list
- Establish a plan to pay down the entirety of the list, including using state aid overpayment claw-backs as a funding source

Staff Recruitment and Retention

- Support executive proposals to continue the current waiver of civil service exam fees through June 2026 and to expand continuous recruitment
- Extend, or make permanent, the existing waiver of the income cap for retired public employees who return to work in a school district or BOCES – set to expire June 2025

Early Childhood

- Permit school districts whose prekindergarten programs are oversubscribed to show enrollment preference to low-income students and/or English language learners
- Authorize school districts and BOCES to directly offer childcare, as automatically licensed providers, if there is a demonstrated community need for such care

Medicaid in Schools

- Urge the state to allocate sufficient funds and submit a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to allow providers to bill for all medically necessary Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic & Treatment (EPSDT)
 - Such services are provided in schools to Medicaid-eligible students

Local Budget Management

- Increase school districts' maximum allowable undesignated fund balance limit above 4%
 - The Rockefeller Institute report on Foundation Aid recommended a limit of 10%, with certain restrictions
 - Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommends that school districts maintain no less than two months' worth of operating expenses on-hand
- Allow districts to borrow from their own reserve funds to cover short term expenses and avoid financing costs



NYSSBA 2025-26 Executive Budget Analysis

State Aid – The executive budget proposes a formula-based school aid increase of \$1.69 billion, or 4.8%, over 2024-25 levels. The aid increase would be driven through a \$1.46 billion increase in Foundation Aid and a \$230 million increase (2.2%) in expense-based and other traditional categorical aids (ex. transportation and BOCES).

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA is pleased to see a school aid package that fully-funds Foundation Aid (when adjusting for student-need formula updates) and expense-based aids. Outside of increases provided for during the recent three-year Foundation Aid phase-in period, this proposal represents one of the largest statewide school aid increases since the Foundation Aid formula was established in 2007.

Foundation Aid – The executive budget would provide a \$1.46 billion increase in Foundation Aid, or 5.9%, over 2024-25 levels, for a total of \$26.4 billion. This includes a guaranteed minimum 2% Foundation Aid increase for all districts.

The executive budget also proposes to change two elements of the Foundation Aid formula which attempt to reflect low-income student enrollment: replacing 2000 Census poverty data with the most recent Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) data, and replacing the usage of Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) data with economically disadvantaged data. The proposal also slightly adjusts support for high-need districts, by shifting upward the maximum state sharing ratio.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA is pleased to see a proposal that returns to meaningful funding increases, following last year’s proposed repeal of save harmless and lower than expected increases for all remaining districts. When adjusting for student-need data adjustments, this year’s proposal fully-funds all districts, with crucial guaranteed minimum increases. While it is important to acknowledge that this proposal will not alleviate budgetary challenges for all districts, NYSSBA is appreciative of these proposed increases.

Further, replacement of sorely outdated 2000 Census poverty data and imperfect FRPL data is consistent with recommendations NYSSBA has stressed in recent years. While these initial formula updates are somewhat limited in their scope, we hope that this is simply the first step in a thoughtful and meaningful process of more comprehensive formula improvements.

Foundation Aid Set-Asides – The executive budget would continue the current \$250 million Foundation Aid set-aside for community school purposes.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA continues to be opposed to restrictions on the use of districts’ Foundation Aid through “set-asides.” Foundation Aid was designed as a general operating aid of which a school district has the ability to decide how and where it is used. School districts should be granted full flexibility in their funding decisions. If the state would like school districts to focus resources in particular areas, they should provide separate and additional funding for districts to do so.

Aid Claims Restriction and Database Freeze – Similar to past executive budgets, this budget includes a proposal to freeze payments on a permanent basis to a maximum payment of those included in the school aid runs supporting the executive budget proposal based on the November database.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA opposes this proposal and hopes to see it omitted in the final budget, as has been the case in past years. As with any budgeting process, cost projections can be volatile. Such volatility does not reflect poor budgeting practices, and should not be treated as such. It is important for school districts to be reimbursed for legitimate actual costs.

Universal School Meals – The executive budget proposes an additional \$160 million to ensure school districts are fully reimbursed for all meals served, bringing the total annual funding amount to \$340 million. The new Universal Free School Meals Program would require all schools that participate in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program to serve free breakfast and lunch to each student, regardless of their family’s income.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA has advocated strongly for a full expansion of free school meals for all students in New York State. This proposal will reduce student hunger and eliminate school meal debt. We are very pleased to see this proposal in the executive budget and applaud the Governor, Legislature, and all of our colleagues who have advocated for this full expansion over the past few years.

Smart Device Ban – The executive budget proposes the “Distraction-Free Schools Initiative,” which would require schools to adopt a policy by August 1, 2025 prohibiting the use of “internet-enabled devices,” including cell phones, during the school day and on school grounds.

The policy must include a method for students to store their internet-enabled devices on-site (including in lockers) during the school day, as well as one or more methods for parents and guardians to contact students during the day, and provide written notification to parents and guardians of those methods at the beginning of each school year.

This prohibition would not apply to: cell phones that do not have the ability to access the internet; devices provided by the school district or BOCES that are used for educational purposes; personal devices when authorized by a teacher, district or BOCES for a specific educational purpose; usage for managing a student’s health; usage in the event of an emergency; usage for translation services; usage pursuant to an individual student’s IEP or 504 plan; or usage where otherwise required by law. In addition, the executive budget proposes to require schools, on an annual basis beginning September 1, 2026, to publish a report detailing enforcement of the policy in the prior school year.

The plan also includes a proposed \$13.5 million appropriation to support districts and BOCES in the implementation of such a plan. The executive budget directs the state Division of Budget to determine distribution of funds, with no additional detail at this time.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA has been part of numerous conversations and meetings throughout the past year with the Governor’s office and other stakeholders, discussing the topic of student use of cell phones in schools. In those discussions, we have consistently expressed support for the Governor’s focus on addressing mental health challenges and improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students.

At the same time, NYSSBA has stressed that we believe local districts and BOCES are best able to reflect the needs and priorities of their local communities when it comes to student use of cell phones and related issues. To that effect, following the Governor’s public intention in early 2024 to address this specific issue, NYSSBA has held multiple conference sessions and workshops on the topic and distributed other supportive materials, working to ensure that school board members have all the information and resources necessary to make informed local decisions.

While we acknowledge attempts to provide some degree of local decision making, flexibility and funding, we continue to believe that any prohibition of student use of cell phones and other internet enabled devices should be determined locally. We also note that the proposed reporting requirement further adds to the administrative burden of school personnel.

Dual Enrollment Programs – The executive budget proposes to expand early college high school programs by continuing ongoing investments in competitive grant programs such as P-TECH and Smart Scholars, and appropriating \$12.2 million for a new round of grants to support college in high school programs. Recipients of this newest proposed grant would need to provide participating students with counseling and academic support.

The executive budget would also direct the New York State Education Department to adopt a statewide policy with guidelines for dual enrollment program participation and data reporting. The policy would require schools and institutes of higher education (IHE) to annually submit to NYSED data on participation and success. Due September 1, 2026, schools and IHEs would need to submit partnership agreements on a form developed by NYSED. These agreements would need to be updated at least every 5 years.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA recognizes the value and popularity of courses and programs that offer students college credit, at little to no cost, while still in high school. We look forward to supporting these, and other, proposals that ease barriers to dual enrollment programs.

Student Health and Mental Health – As part of her State of the State, the Governor formally announced the Office of Mental Health’s (OMH) initiative to expand Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) training, to train both teens and adults who work with teens to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges, including the impacts of bullying and school violence. Funding was secured for a nonprofit to develop statewide training in last year’s

budget, and OMH currently has a request out for applications. The executive budget also proposes to empower school boards to hire physician assistants to serve as school health service directors.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA commends the Governor for her continued focus on student health and wellbeing. We support these proposals, and will advocate for additional provisions such as funding for mental health professionals and greater expansion of school-based Medicaid-billable services.

Zero-Emissions Buses – The executive budget makes no proposals related to the zero-emissions school bus (ZEB) transition mandate.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA is disheartened to see no additional proposed action on this topic. As the first phase of the mandate beginning in 2027 looms near, districts are facing higher prices and more challenges than originally envisioned when the mandate was first enacted. Until or unless the transition timeline is repealed or modified, NYSSBA will continue to advocate for changes to the transition timeline, and for additional support to schools. As part of that effort, NYSSBA recently joined our Educational Conference Board (ECB) partners in offering nine specific recommendations. Details can be viewed [here](#).

Prior Year Aid Claims – The executive budget does not include any restoration of the state’s funding to make payments against the prior year aid claims list.

NYSSBA Position/Response – The state first eliminated its annual funding to make payments against the prior year aid claims list in the 2021-22 budget. Prior to that budget, the state had annually allocated nearly \$20 million to pay down against the list of approved aid claims for certain past expenses from school districts. With no funding included in the budget, the \$300 million owed by the state to school districts will only continue to grow. In addition, the lack of prior year aid claim funding significantly blunts the positive impact of the building and transportation aid forgiveness provisions included in the 2022-23 enacted state budget.

Career and Technical Education – The executive budget does not include any changes to the cap on aidable salary expenses for BOCES instructors, nor any increase in special services aid for non-component districts.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA is disappointed that there was no proposed increase to the BOCES aidable salary cap or special services aid. At a time when BOCES enrollment and career and technical education are more popular than ever, the outdated \$30,000 cap – in place since 1992 – is long overdue for an adjustment designed to meet present need.

Unrestricted Fund Balance – The executive budget makes no changes to the 4% cap on unrestricted fund balance for school districts.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA was hopeful to see a modest change to the 4% cap on unrestricted fund balance, given the Rockefeller Institute’s general endorsement of this notion in its Foundation Aid Study report. We will continue to advocate for a reasonable change to the cap that simply gives districts some flexibility in the budgeting process.

Civil Service and Staffing – The executive budget proposes to continue the current waiver of civil service exam fees through June 13, 2026 and to expand continuous recruitment. The executive budget does not propose another extension of the waiver on the \$35,000 income cap for retired public employees returning to state service. That waiver is currently set to expire on June 30, 2025.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA supports the executive budget’s two proposals to improve the civil service process. NYSSBA has advocated for common sense changes to the civil service process to help school districts meet the challenges associated with staff shortages. These steps represent some easing of that process and will help to facilitate hiring. However, NYSSBA was hopeful to see another extension of the waiver of the \$35,000 retiree earnings cap and will advocate for either an extension of the waiver or a permanent increase to the cap.

Curriculum Resources – The executive budget provides \$500,000 for the New York State Education Department to create and distribute educational materials and resources focused on Indigenous cultures and histories. The budget would also provide \$1 million for the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to create and distribute an educators’ toolkit for providing students of various ages with the skills necessary for critically consuming media. Finally, the budget would provide the New York Agriculture in the Classroom program with an additional \$500,000.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA appreciates the state providing resources for schools and educators to enhance the teaching of Indigenous peoples, media literacy and agriculture, rather than legislatively mandating what curriculum is taught in schools.

Pre-kindergarten – The executive budget maintains level funding for state-funded pre-kindergarten programs.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA will continue to advocate for increased investments that will ultimately provide enough funding for all school districts to be able to provide universal pre-kindergarten for their 3- and 4-year old students, should they wish to do so. We will also be advocating for legislation that would allow school districts whose prekindergarten programs are overenrolled to prioritize enrolling economically disadvantaged students or English language learners when allocating seats for the state’s universal prekindergarten program.

Continuation of Competitive Grants – The executive budget proposes to continue ongoing investments in competitive grant programs such as the master teacher program, grants for advanced coursework and AP/IB fee subsidies, and mental health programs.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA is pleased to not see proposed cuts to these initiatives which have been used by districts across the state in support of worthwhile student programs and services.

Special Education Cost Shift – The executive budget would permanently eliminate the state share of costs related to Committee on Special Education (CSE) placements for districts outside of New York City, and transfer the state’s responsibility for maintenance costs of state-operated schools for the blind and deaf onto school districts. This change was first adopted in the 2020-21 enacted

budget with annual extenders in the last five enacted budgets. This proposal would create a permanent cost shift. Prior to the shift, the state covered 18.424% of maintenance costs for CSE placements, with school districts covering 38.424% and the locality assuming the remainder. Elimination of the state share moved the school district cost to 56.848%

NYSSBA Position/Response – As in last year’s executive budget proposal, NYSSBA is opposed to making these cost shifts permanent. The state has estimated the cost shift to result in an annual \$28.6 million burden on school districts, effectively reducing opportunities to invest in other valuable programs and services for students. School districts should not be forced to continue to absorb an unnecessary cost shift such as this.

Cybersecurity – The executive budget would require local governments, including school districts, to report cybersecurity incidents through a centralized system to DHSES.

NYSSBA Position/Response – NYSSBA appreciates the state’s recognition of the grave threat that cyberattacks have on school districts and other local governments. At the same time, policies should be flexible enough to ensure each local government can meet its own needs and is supported by an appropriate level of state funding. Additionally, school districts and their employees are currently required to report such incidents under state law and regulation. NYSSBA will work to let the legislature know that this requirement may be duplicative for school districts.

Modifications to STAR Eligibility Requirements – The executive budget proposes several modifications to the STAR program. These included:

- Only requiring one owner of a property who is a resident to be 65 or older, as opposed to only the primary resident
- Only accounting for the income of owners who primarily reside on the property for eligibility purposes
- No longer requiring owners who do not file income tax returns to file income worksheets after three consecutive years of eligible filings

NYSSBA Position/Response – These changes would have no net fiscal impact on school district finances due to the structure of the STAR program in which the state reimburses districts to offset revenue reductions generated by the credit. However, it is important for districts to be aware of any changes to STAR as many questions from residents on the program are directed to the school district.

New and Extended Property Tax Exemptions and Credits – The executive proposes some additional property tax credits and exemptions, targeted at economic development by addressing affordable housing and vacant and abandoned structures. These credits and exemptions would be at local option.

NYSSBA Position/Response – While these additional credits and exemptions are expected to have a very limited impact on school districts, NYSSBA has consistently requested that the state pay the difference for any new, modified, or extended property tax credits or exemptions, rather than passing the cost of them onto local governments.



Federal State & Local Tax (SALT) Deduction – The executive budget operates on the assumption that the \$10,000 cap will be continued by the current federal administration. The Governor called on Congress and President Trump to fully repeal the cap.

NYSSBA Position/Response – The State and Local Tax (SALT) federal tax deduction was capped by Congress and the first Trump Administration at \$10,000 in 2017. The cap is set to expire on December 31, 2025. However, that outcome is not guaranteed. There have been numerous proposals in recent Congresses to raise or modify the cap, none of which was successful.

NYSSBA has advocated for the repeal of the SALT cap since its enactment in 2017. The cap effectively results in double taxation for millions of New York school taxpayers. NYSSBA applauds and echoes the Governor's support for a full repeal of the cap and calls on the New York Congressional Delegation to also support its full repeal or expiration.



ZERO-EMISSIONS SCHOOL BUS TRANSITION: — 2022 ASSUMPTIONS VS. TODAY —

	
Zero Emissions Bus (ZEB) costs would fall over time	Costs for ZEBs have risen faster than inflation
Total Cost of Ownership Parity (TCOP) would occur in 2027	TCOP date is now uncertain
Ongoing federal support	Federal support is now unclear, with funding in the near future at serious risk
Normal rate of voter approval	In 2024, 33% of ZEB purchase propositions failed, even where funding was available
Manufacturer range estimates would be reliable	Range estimates do not match real-world range, with cold exacerbating the issue
Manufacturing would increase as states adopted transition timelines	Manufacturing remains persistently low, and a major North American manufacturer recently declared bankruptcy
Wait times for fulfillment and maintenance would be manageable	Wait times have remained stubbornly long
Electrical capacity would not be significant impediment	Many districts lack capacity, and where it could be increased, costs are staggeringly high to do so
Storage would not be major barrier	Due to storage best practices, as well as lack of aidability, storage is a meaningful challenge

Source: NYSSBA Research, 02/25

New York State Educational Conference Board



ASSOCIATION
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Zero-Emissions School Bus Mandate

School leaders understand the effects of a changing climate on their districts, and the long-term effects on the lives of the students to whom they dedicate themselves. They also understand the goals of the transition to all zero-emissions school buses (ZEBs), and how this aspirational plan would assist the state in meeting its overall climate policy goals and improve health outcomes. However, with more than 700 districts being treated with a broad brush of universality, in one of the most socio-economically and geographically diverse states in the nation, and barriers that are becoming increasingly insuperable, the transition as currently proposed is not achievable for a significant number of districts. If left unaddressed, these barriers will force districts to reduce educational opportunities for students, increase taxes and spend exorbitant sums, and cause voter unrest. Some of our memberships have even expressed support for a full repeal of the law or for significant changes to the current implementation timeline. While some notable progress has been made over the past year on several recommendations from several of the undersigned organizations, much more must be done to stave off the worst effects of this underfunded mandate.

Significant Issues Remain, and New Issues Have Become Apparent

Unlike consumer electric vehicles that have seen steep price declines, ZEBs cost anywhere from two to upwards of four times more than traditional internal combustion engine buses (ICEs), and costs have not been going down as advocates had said they would during the 2022 budget deliberations. In fact, under the statewide contract for ZEBs which was let by the Office of General Services in December 2022, ZEB prices have increased by 8.7% against roughly 6.5% inflation during the same period. Additionally, the estimates for when total cost of ownership parity (TCOP) between ZEBs and ICEs would be achieved, according to advocates during budget deliberations, was 2027, spurring the 2027 purchase date codification. Since then, advocates have pushed back the TCOP date to 2030 and beyond. Also, questions remain concerning future cost reduction in ZEB's, given the state mandate has eliminated incentives for manufacturers to lower costs due to lack of natural competitiveness in the sector. There is also the stark possibility that federal support will be scaled back or removed altogether in the coming months and years.

Additionally, electrical capacity is not only a challenge for most districts, but is and will be an insurmountable barrier for many. In response to an order from the Public Service Commission, the Joint Utilities of New York analyzed the current electrical capacity of every school bus depot in the state (public and private) in their respective service areas. The findings were bleak – 15% of districts currently do not have the electrical capacity to support a single ZEB. Additionally, districts across the state have been told that infrastructure upgrades necessary to increase electrical capacity will lead to costs sometimes in the range of millions of dollars. This is all against the backdrop of the state's overall grid: the Independent System Operators Reliability Needs Assessment this year found that the state's grid will not be able to handle demand without significant resource development.

Lastly, beyond costs and electric capacity, other complicating factors remain. The severe shortage of drivers, especially prevalent for the Big 5 and rural school districts, is likely to intensify due to a

presumed need to expand fleet sizes to meet the same demand. This need for fleet expansion is due to: range estimates from manufacturers being greater than real-world figures due to cold and terrain prevalent across New York; reduced payload capacity of ZEBs versus traditional buses (meaning fewer students can be transported on each bus); and significant “downtime” for ZEBs where they are not able to run at all. Increased fleet sizes mean more drivers will need to be hired, trained, and retained.

In the short term, we offer the following suggestions in response to challenges we continue to hear from our members, voters, and the education community at large.

Increasing and Unexpected Costs Means the State Should Cover the Cost of the Transition

The state has not estimated the cost of the transition on a statewide basis. One think tank analysis found that the cost would be between \$8 and \$15.25 billion (without infrastructure and facility upgrades), and the Rockefeller Institute’s recent Foundation Aid analysis found the state should “fully underwrite the costs of this state initiative to transition each local school district to an all-electric school bus fleet.” While education advocates across the state supported the inclusion of ZEB-specific funding in the Environmental Bond Act of 2022, roughly half of that money has been allocated, to a negligible effect: according to the NYS Education Department (NYSED), less than 100 are on the road statewide. Additionally, as noted previously, fleet sizes will likely need to be expanded, which will drive up demand and costs.

State-Funded District-Specific Fleet Implementation Plans Should Guide Each District

Currently, districts engage with third-parties to analyze their routes, energy capacity, and fleets. Districts are given a route-by-route analysis, showing how much of a ZEB’s charge would be left at the end of each route in favorable and unfavorable conditions. These analyses, which take into account the specific circumstances of each district, offer a nuanced and more realistic way to measure a district’s transition feasibility, more so than a uniform artificial deadline created before the technology to support it was available.

There should be a system wherein a route feasibility analysis (or Fleet Electrification Plan) guides each district and contractor’s individual transition timeline, and these should be fully funded by the state. There should be a threshold end-of-route charge requirement, such as 20%, that a ZEB would finish its route/routes with before charging is necessary, even in the worst conditions. That route would then be considered achievable, and part of the district’s transition. Timelines for transition would then be individualized for each district. If technology advances and costs are realistic, there could then be a review to determine if 100% ZEB is attainable for all routes in all districts.

Maintain Voter Control Over School District Operations

Local control over school district operations, both through the direct representative nature of school board elections, as well as the requirement to receive voter approval for several school district activities, is the cornerstone of the social contract between residents and their government when it comes to public education. With respect to the ZEB transition, this power of the populace can manifest in several ways: through the issuance of debt (in the form of bonds) to purchase ZEBs and related items such as chargers; for the upgrade of electrical infrastructure to support ZEBs; for the capital construction of new facilities to house ZEBs; for the creation or modification of reserve funds to support ZEB purchases, as well as expenditures from those funds; and lastly, the fact that candidates for school board on either side of the issue can run campaigns based on their attitude towards the ZEB transition.

If this power is stripped away from voters by a uniform statewide policy, for the first time in the more-than 200-year history of New York public education, we have concerns it would negatively impact budget passage rates. This likelihood is bolstered by the recent backlash against proposals to phase out save harmless, as well as the public response to NYSED's regionalization plan initiative.

Allow for Hybrid and Low-Emission Buses for Districts Facing Additional Challenges

Another option to smooth the rigid edges of the transition, while addressing environmental and health concerns, are to expand the transition to allow for hybrid and low-emission buses. These buses are able to address the concerns of increased costs, lack of electrical capacity, charging infrastructure, "downtime" of ZEBs, and range capacities. Additionally, the exorbitantly long wait times between ordering a ZEB and it being on the road is significantly reduced for these types of vehicles. These options could either be a permanent part of the statewide fleet portfolio, or act as a bridge technology on the path towards 100% ZEBs.

Allow for Increased Transportation Storage Facility Costs to be Aidable

Finding or building locations to store ZEBs is crucial to extend their range in colder weather, as well as to keep charging times down to manageable lengths for school transportation operations. However, there are costs associated with these storage facilities that are not present for ICEs, such as: higher power lifts due to increased unladen vehicle weights, larger garages for the longer and taller ZEBs, need for increased electrical capacity, equipment and software for advanced fire suppression systems, and the installation and operation of charge management systems. Additionally, manufacturers recommend storing ZEBs farther apart from each other than ICEs – which in the context of current bus storage practices poses extreme challenges. However, storage facility costs are currently not aidable with transportation or building aid. If districts were able to access aid for these costs, this would ensure an equitable distribution of state support to districts who need it to construct these facilities.

Require Certified Range Estimates from Manufacturers

According to manufacturers, the average range for ZEBs is about 150 miles. However, real world findings have fallen short of those claims; estimates don't account for battery degradation (much like the batteries in our cell phones get less from the same charge over time, the batteries in ZEBs degrade over time), or the effects of cold weather or terrain on ZEB range. Findings of significant reductions in range, both with and without cold weather, have been found across the U.S. and Canada. A 2023 Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation report found that battery range in cold conditions decreased 30–40% for one ZEB model and up to 80% for another; even in normal conditions, range was about 20-25% less than promised by manufacturers. In Calgary, a decreased range of 33% was found. In West Virginia, with a pilot of the "Beast," the ZEB with the longest manufacturer range estimate (300 miles), districts found a real-world range of 200-250 miles; this diminished range was without any testing in cold conditions. These are not minor variations, and given the across-the-board deficiencies, action must be taken.

New York likely already possesses legal authority to force manufacturers to provide accurate range estimates. First, under Part 218 of the Department of Environmental Conservation's regulations, to investigate and enforce manufacturer's range estimates. Alternatively, the state could collaborate with California and other states with ZEB mandates under California's broad authority under the Clean Air Act. Additionally, the state could require contract provisions related to range estimates that in some way require real-world estimates as a condition for eligibility for bus dealer participation

in the New York State Bus Incentive Program. Lastly, the state has significant power to pressure manufacturers by requiring them to provide real-world estimates in order to qualify their ZEB models under the statewide master contract let by OGS.

Ensure Third-Party Transportation Providers Have Equitable Access to Funding

Largely due to the Big 5's relationships with third-party transportation providers, as well as many other districts across the state, a comparable number of students in New York get to school on buses managed by third-parties as those managed by districts. However, third-party vendors are not able to access funding at the same rate as school districts related to the ZEB transition, such as for fleet electrification planning. These arbitrary barriers make the transition more difficult, and if left unchanged will mean increased costs will be passed onto districts.

Require Utilities to Provide Specialized Rate Structures for School Districts and Contractors

School districts that are transitioning to ZEBs provide benefits to utilities in the electrification of our state's grid. The charging of ZEBs during off-peak times, as well as their ability to participate in Vehicle to Grid (V2G) technology, may provide significant stability to utility providers' operations. V2G bidirectional charging technology allows for ZEBs to essentially act as batteries that can distribute power back to the grid when overall demand is high, or when emergency backup power is needed. Additionally, during the summer when demand is most significant for most consumers, ZEBs will largely not be charging. Lastly, as compared to other customers, school district demand for electricity is stable and predictable.

Other states have had mixed results in terms of whether their cost-per-mile is cheaper from electricity versus traditional fuel, partially because of the rates being paid and how those rates are determined. To take advantage of the unique situation that electrification of school transportation poses, as well as to provide those benefits directly to school districts, utilities should be mandated to provide specialized rate structures for school districts that engage in electrification; this will also further incentive the ZEB transition for districts.

Regular Stakeholder Engagement

We appreciate the roundtable on the transition convened by the chairs of the Energy, Transportation, Education, and Science and Technology Assembly committees, and their invitation for several of our groups' participation in late 2023. We strongly encourage the regular convening of such stakeholder sessions to find ways to achieve progress and address the transition's barriers in real-time. Such sessions should include stakeholders from schools, transportation providers, bus distributors, bus manufacturers, administrative agencies, the Governor's office, and the legislature.

The New York State Educational Conference Board is comprised of the Association of School Business Officials New York; the Conference of Big 5 School Districts; the New York State Council of School Superintendents; New York State PTA; the New York State School Boards Association; New York State United Teachers; and the School Administrators Association of New York State.