

ARGYLE CENTRAL SCHOOL	BALLSTON SPA CENTRAL SCHOOL	BOLTON CENTRAL SCHOOL	CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL SCHOOL	CORINTH CENTRAL SCHOOL
FORT ANN CENTRAL SCHOOL	FORT EDWARD UNION FREE SCHOOL	GALWAY CENTRAL SCHOOL	GLENS FALLS CITY SCHOOL	GLENS FALLS COMMON DISTRICT
GRANVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL	GREENWICH CENTRAL SCHOOL	HADLEY-LUZERNE CENTRAL SCHOOL	HARTFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL	HUDSON FALLS CENTRAL SCHOOL
JOHNSBURG CENTRAL SCHOOL	LAKE GEORGE CENTRAL SCHOOL	MECHANICVILLE CITY SCHOOL	MINERVA CENTRAL SCHOOL	NEWCOMB CENTRAL SCHOOL
NORTH WARREN CENTRAL SCHOOL	QUEENSBURY UNION FREE SCHOOL	SALEM CENTRAL SCHOOL	SARATOGA SPRINGS CITY SCHOOLS	SCHUYLerville CENTRAL SCHOOL
STILLWATER CENTRAL SCHOOL	WARRENSBURG CENTRAL SCHOOL	WATERFORD-HALFMOON UNION FREE SCHOOL	WHITEHALL CENTRAL SCHOOL	



WASHINGTON-SARATOGA-WARREN-HAMILTON-ESSEX Chief School Officers

2024 LEGISLATIVE AND BUDGET PRIORITIES

Increase State Support for Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide students with essential skills that prepare them for college and careers. However, the existing BOCES aid formula for CTE programs operated by BOCES only allows districts to receive aid on the first \$30,000 of a BOCES instructor's salary. The average salary of a CTE teacher is now at least \$65,000 and the aid-able portion should be increased to ensure that districts can adequately support these programs.

We request that the BOCES aid reimbursement for BOCES CTE teacher's salary be make the first \$60,000 aidable over the next three years.

Workforce Development

School districts are facing extreme workforce challenges. Teachers, bus drivers, and other staff shortages are making it increasingly difficult to fully and properly staff buildings. Compounding the issues caused by the lack of candidates in the pipeline, current professionals are increasingly choosing to leave their roles earlier in their careers. To address the growing problems of recruitment and retention, the state should consider policy changes and programs that would attract people to needed roles and incentivize employees to stay. Increased flexibility for teacher certifications adopted in the last year has helped districts to more effectively utilize those teachers that they are able to hire but continued adjustments and increased reciprocity with other states are needed. The restrictive benefit structure and older retirement age for Tier 6 of the retirement system have diminished the effectiveness of a once attractive recruitment and retention tool that could be restored with adjustments to the benefit structure. In the short term, once again extending the ability of retirees to work in school districts without pension penalty or a 211 waiver would allow districts to continue to use willing retirees to fill gaps while the employee pipeline is strengthened.

We request that policymakers increase flexibilities in teacher certification, retiree employment and Tier 6 reform.

Ongoing Capital Projects

Current law allows school districts to make one "capital outlay" annually. Under this provision, each district may conduct one project that has a cost of \$100,000 or less and is paid for in cash each year. Districts then receive their total building aid on the full project in the next year. Because these projects do not require voter approval or borrowing, they can be completed more efficiently and save both the state and the district money, because of the lack of interest. The current project threshold of \$100,000 was established in 2002 and has not increased since. In the two decades that have passed, the relative buying power of \$100,000 has decreased significantly. That was true before COVID-19, but in the last three years, prices for materials and labor have increased exponentially.

We request that the spending limit for capital outlays be raised to \$250,000 annually beginning in the 2024-25 school year.

2024-2025 School Aid

Districts around the state, including those in the WSWHE BOCES region are appreciative of the State's efforts to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula and expense based aids. To ensure that all students are supported, we ask that the following provisions be included in the next state budget:

- A due minimum increase for all districts, regardless of Foundation Aid phase-in level.
- A “save-harmless” provision to ensure a stable funding baseline for all districts.
- Support an initial evaluation of the current cost to educate a successful student.

We request that these provisions be included in the 2024-25 State Budget.

Zero-Emission Buses

School districts around the state recognize the importance of taking steps to reduce emissions and protect the environment for the students of the future. Current state law requires that all new school buses acquired be zero emissions by 2027 and all buses in operation must be zero emissions by 2035. The first state guidance on the transition was not released until almost a year and a half after the law was enacted – and districts are already running into barriers. The supply of buses for the districts that have the funding and infrastructure in place to begin operations are not adequate or timely. Existing systems and supports have not been updated to reflect this change. Districts need to be able to avail themselves of the full range of state resources and supports through existing aid streams and programs.

We request that the State evaluate all existing programs around transportation, capital and planning and make updates to all planning and funding streams to include costs related to planning and executing this transition.

ADDITIONAL ONGOING ISSUES

Small Group Health Insurance

Prior to the adoption of the ACA, a “small group” for health insurance was defined as an employer with 1-50 versus 1-100 full-time equivalent employees. During the adoption period of the ACA, this was reconsidered many times and ultimately states were authorized to implement the old standard. New York generally chose to adopt the new 1-100 standard; but for several years, school districts have been allowed to remain in their health insurance consortium, despite having 50-100 full-time equivalent employees. This authorization has been extended through December of 2028.

School Year Calendar

School leaders around the state, including the WSWHE BOCES region are proud of the diverse population of our state and applaud the efforts of local leaders to adjust their school calendars to reflect changing populations. However, the addition of new holidays and mandated days without instruction is creating increasing pressure on an already pressured school calendar. School districts must have 180 instructional days between September 1 and June 30 each year. While there is some moderate flexibility, allowing for some superintendent conference days to be held at the end of August, student instructional days are limited to that September-June window. Once mandated holidays, student days off, Regents exams, and contractual provisions are considered, there is actually very little flexibility in the calendar. These limitations should be considered when reviewing legislation that impacts the school calendar.