



# 2020-2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*Unprecedented Times Require An Unprecedented Response*



School Safety

Equitable Access

COVID-19 Flexibility

Predictable and Sustainable School Funding

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FISCAL CHALLENGES IN THE 2020-2021 BUDGET

- Foundation Aid remained flat from the 2019-2020 level.
- Pandemic Adjustment to Aid was allocated across public and nonpublic schools.
- Foundation Aid is \$3.6 billion below expected funding with 85.5% of that funding intended for low-wealth school districts.
- Long Island school districts receive just under 67% of their revenue from property taxes and other revenue compared to 47% in the rest of the state.
- Long Island school districts receive 31.6% of their school revenue from the state whereas the rest of the state receives 49%.
- Long Island educates 16% of the state's students, but received only 12% of the state aid.

### FISCAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LONG ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- School districts on Long Island spent in excess of \$105 million on COVID-19 related expenses.
- Long Island school districts added an additional 5,103 positions related to COVID-19.
- Over 58% of those positions were added in our highest-need school districts.
- Over 40% of those costs were incurred in our low-wealth school districts, which are generally least able to afford it.

### SCHOOL SAFETY

#### *Legislative actions essential to supporting school safety:*

- Create an expense-driven categorical aid to partially reimburse school districts for expenditures related to school security in a wealth-sensitive manner.
- Remove the earnings limit for retired law enforcement officers working as school security staff.
- Add public school buildings to the list of public places that can be removed from the list of polling places.
- Require quarterly meetings of the Smart Schools review board to expedite dissemination of funds for safety-related items.

### EQUITABLE ACCESS

#### *Technology*

- Support for access to technology and broadband capacity. This pandemic has proven basic access to technology and the internet impacts students across this state inequitably.

#### *Social-Emotional Health Services*

- Mental health issues and substance use and abuse have increased dramatically during this pandemic. Access to care is an equity issue. The approximate overall budget amount allocated to meet student mental health needs for Long Island school districts in 2020-2021 was approximately \$64.5 million.



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### COVID-19 FLEXIBILITY

- At a time when all aspects of the economy are struggling, our focus this year is on requesting flexibility rather than finances.
- Increasing Flexibility Related to Fund Balance and Reserve Funds – This would provide school districts the ability to save and borrow from their reserves. Borrowing from reserves should not be tied to repayment with interest.
- APPR adjustments – We recommend suspending the APPR process through the pandemic.
- Amend the “Wicks Law” to increase the project cost threshold and to allow school districts to enter into Project Labor Agreements for school construction work. Wicks Law requirements unnecessarily cost school districts 20% to 30% more on construction projects.
- Authorize Transportation Aid to be applied when buses are used to provide students with access to school services.
- Special Education – Address the underlying drivers that are pushing the cost of special education services up.
- English Language Learners – Modify requirements under Part 154, including English language learners, to be consistent with those of special education.
- Establish an “Education Mandate Relief Redesign Team” to review ways to reduce the costs of unfunded mandates to school districts.

### PREDICTABLE AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL FUNDING

#### *Revised/Revamped Foundation Formula*

- The Foundation Aid formula provides unrestricted operating aid and comprises over 70% of total school aid. When Foundation Aid is reduced, the poorest districts are typically most severely affected with close to a \$3,500 per pupil gap that low-wealth districts receive versus what they are owed.
- Instead of flowing the way the formula was designed, school districts must wait for the allocation of state aid to schools prior to being able to finalize their budgets for the following school year.
- With the institution of the tax levy limit placing constraints on school districts to raise local money, a multiyear formula school aid would greatly assist school districts with long-term planning and budgeting.

#### *Modifications to the Tax Levy Cap*

- Now is the time to make the necessary adjustments to the law to address the unintended consequences. We advocate for the following prudent modifications:
- Establish a fixed 2% tax levy cap.
  - Modify the tax levy limit calculation to exclude expenses related to school safety, security and COVID-19.
  - Exempt the cost of new government mandates and the burgeoning cost of health insurance.
  - Eliminate the possibility of negative tax levy caps.
  - Include properties covered by PILOTs in the tax base.