



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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Written Testimony of Commissioner Dr. Betty A. Rosa
New York State Education Department
Joint Legislative Elementary Education Budget Hearing

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Deputy Commissioner Dr. Jeffrey Matteson; Chief Financial Officer
Deputy Commissioner Adult Career and Continuing Education S
Education Ceylane Meyers-Ruff, and P-12 Deputy Commissio
Dingle and Jason Harmon. I also want to acknowledge and thank
and the members of the Board of Regents, who are watching today.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) comprises
and interconnected system of educational programs and services
raise the knowledge, skill, and opportunity of all New Yorkers.

To achieve this mission, the Regents and NYSED have developed
guide our work. Each of our budget goals and priorities is steeply
opportunity and would provide the resources needed to achieve them.

The Executive Budget includes some important Regents and NYSED
priorities in the Executive Budget proposal, including investments in

- x College in High School Opportunities: Dual Enrollment
school students with the opportunity to take college courses
time and money in college. Dual enrollment also positively impacts
college outcomes on average, such as high school graduation
success, and completion.
- x Preservation of the Education Building: The Board of Regents
critical importance of preserving the historic Education Building
investment in capital needs. Maintenance and modernization
to ensure a safe and effective workplace for the Department
appreciate the \$20 million that is included in the Executive Budget
a reasonable estimate of the work is closer to \$40 million.

There are needs that were not addressed and we request that the Legislature consider the following:

Foundation Aid:

The 2024-25 enacted budget allocated \$2 million to the Rockefeller Institute for a comprehensive foundation aid study. The Institute's final report offered valuable recommendations, many of which require careful analysis to guarantee equitable funding distribution.

NYSED remains committed to enhancing the foundation aid formula to ensure equitable and sustainable support for all public school students, regardless of their community – rural, suburban, or urban.

The Executive Budget's proposed modifications to foundation aid represent meaningful, but minor progress. Notably, the updates to student need measures align with recommendations from both the Board of Regents and the Rockefeller Institute. However, these changes constitute an initial step, and modernizing this intricate formula requires a clear, long-term vision. We have not yet seen this vision; planning needs to start now.

NYSED stands ready to provide technical assistance and data analysis to support well-considered updates that bolster educational equity and outcomes statewide. The foundation aid formula is a complex system where individual changes can have unintended consequences, and multiple changes may interact unpredictably without thorough analysis. Any modification must be grounded in sound research.

While the Rockefeller study proposes considerations such as graduated weights for English Language Learners and poverty, the specific weight assignments appear to lack a robust empirical foundation. Further research is needed to validate these proposed adjustments and develop a more rigorous, data-driven framework for determining appropriate formula weights.

The report also acknowledges several recommendations that need further research and review, such as the approach to students with disabilities, the adjustment for rural districts, and a long-term strategy for the successful school's analysis that underpins the formula.

In the past two years, the Regents have consistently requested funding for a comprehensive study that includes research and modeling, as implemented in other states. This level of analysis requires time but is crucial to ensure the foundation formula reflects the most current and effective practices as well as the needs of all students in successful schools.

Funding to Implement Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures Changes
(\$2.3 million)

academic improvement aid. In subsequent years, the core reimbursement amount in all three special services aids should be increased to ensure students in districts that do not participate in a BOCES program receive equitable aid.

This funding was not included in the Executive Budget proposal.

Universal Pre-K

The Executive made an extensive commitment to expanding access to affordable childcare across New York State, however, we also urge the legislature to consider two critical aspects:

- x The educational imperative: High-quality childcare must be viewed as early learning, providing foundational skills and experiences from birth to age three. It is more than childcare; it's an investment in our children's future success.
- x The impact on prekindergarten: Childcare and prekindergarten programs often share the same workforce and rely on similar providers. Yet, despite the name, universal prekindergarten is not universally available across the state, and its funding has not kept pace with the proposed increases for childcare.

This Executive Budget proposal lacks any additional funding to improve or expand our pre-k system. This disparity in funding creates an unsustainable system for providers and undermines the quality of early learning experiences for our youngest children.

Childcare and prekindergarten are a continuum of critical early learning opportunities and deserve to be viewed as such. Siloing these programs will ultimately harm children and hinder our ability to provide them with the best possible start in life.

Expanding Access to Universal Prekindergarten (\$25 million): Last year, the Governor and legislature removed barriers in the use of state prekindergarten funds. This year, the Regents recommend a \$25 million expansion of funding to districts that wish to provide additional services and have students who remain unserved under the existing funding streams. The funding approach would be the greater of the statutory universal prekindergarten (UPK) amount per pupil or \$10,000. After year one, this funding would roll into UPK to avoid multiplying programs. The \$25 million amount is sufficient to meaningfully expand access and ensure the entire amount is utilized.

This funding was not included in the Executive Budget proposal.

Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) Through Age 22 (\$65.4 million)

The Second Circuit Court of Appeals' decision in *A.R. v. Connecticut Board of Education* requires that public schools in New York provide special education and related services to resident students with disabilities until twenty-two, or the day before the student's 22nd birthday, unless they have obtained a high school diploma. New York State Law provides

Our vision is to elevate the New York State Museum to become one of the nation's premier state museums within the next decade. Achieving this ambitious goal requires the collective support of stakeholders, policymakers, and the community. However, without resolving our persistent financial challenges, this vision is not tenable.

Despite considerable fiscal hurdles, the Museum continues to thrive through innovative public programming. Recent successes include the Halloween Spooktacular, which welcomed over 900 visitors, Sesame Street's 55th Birthday Celebration, which attracted more than 2,200 attendees, and our New Year's Eve Celebration, which brought together 800 children and families. Other highlights include a sensory-friendly event for neurodiverse families, several engaging lectures, and a multitude of vibrant cultural celebrations, underscoring the Museum's vital role as an educational and cultural cornerstone for New Yorkers.

This February, we will introduce a new initiative featuring weekday, family-friendly programming—happening every single weekday—designed to provide fresh, engaging experiences that deepen connections to New York's vibrant history and culture.

Looking ahead, the Museum will soon embark on a national search for its next Director, led by a former Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. This search will ensure we identify a visionary leader to guide the Museum into its next era of excellence.

We remain dedicated to our mission and invite lawmakers, stakeholders, and external partners to visit and witness firsthand the transformative work being done to preserve and share New York's cultural heritage. We look forward to ongoing collaboration to secure the Museum, Library, and Archives' place as a source of pride and inspiration for this and future generations of visitors.

This funding was not included in the Executive Budget proposal.

Conclusion

While the Executive Budget proposal contains laudable and needed resources for schools and students, more conversations and thoughtful long-term policy and budget planning, to ensure successful preparation for college and careers and that all students have access to a world-class education, is required. We also need appropriate funding to continue providing the important technical support and customer service that we offer to the field. The critical issues that we have outlined today also need to be addressed.

The possible and significant changes on the federal level when it comes to education could impact critical programs such as: those that support students with disabilities, English Language Learners, child nutrition programs, and even our Department where federal funds currently support the majority of our staff. While we generally agree that education decisions are best left to the state as well as to local school districts- support and recourse must always be there for our most vulnerable students and their families. Federal funding

needs to also allow us to continue provide targeted support, oversight, and technical assistance to our local school and to ensure that all children receive a quality education. Checks and balances on systems are critical at every level- the very fabric of a meaningful and successful democracy relies on this notion.

While we have to take a wait and see approach and don't want to send out alarms as ensuring a quality education for all our children should be a bipartisan issue- we also need a strategic contingency plan and flexibility for what could be. This is currently not found within this Executive Budget proposal. We ask that the Legislature do this important work with the Executive and make such a plan- especially as an agency that is not an Executive one- we need you now more than ever. We need to work together even more than we have ever done so- our children need us to rise to the occasion in this moment and we simply can't let them down.

In summary, our proposals are on behalf of the countless students, educators, parents, and stakeholder groups we serve and interact with daily. I look forward to your questions and to working with all of you on our shared goal to increase equity, access, and opportunities in education for all New York State students.