

2025 Legislative Priorities



School Aid

Recommendations

Update the Foundation Aid Formula by:

- ▶ Using updated datasets;
- ▶ Recognizing fixed district costs, such as buildings and transportation;
- ▶ Reflecting cost drivers such as health insurance and inflation; and
- ▶ Reflect the impact of the tax cap, which distorts the representation of income and property wealth in a district.

Fully fund expense-based aids.



In 2025, BOCES of New York State urges the State to provide adequate funding for school districts and BOCES, and to commit to a funding formula that is predictable on an ongoing basis.

BOCES do not receive Foundation Aid or any direct formula aid from the State. BOCES rely almost entirely on their component school districts for funding. As a result, the financial stability and health of these districts—and therefore the distribution of Foundation Aid—is critically important to our members.

Despite discussion of its complexity, the Foundation Aid formula is based on a simple and reasonable framework. It starts with a number, adjusted for regional costs, that reflects the expense required to provide a student with their constitutionally entitled education. This number is then divided into two parts: the State's contribution and the expected local contribution. Both shares are based on consideration of the needs of the students in a community and that community's ability to pay.

However, like most data driven frameworks, the results are only as sound and accurate as the data used. Unfortunately, many of these data sets along with the calculations used to generate them, have become outdated and therefore less accurate, and reliable. These flawed datasets and calculations are contributors to the public's frustration and confusion about how Foundation Aid is distributed and should be reexamined and updated.



Modernize BOCES Aid

Recommendations

- ⦿ **Increase the aidable CTE instructional salary under the current BOCES Aid formula from \$30,000 to \$60,000 over three years.**
- ⦿ **Adopt a commensurate increase in special services aid.**



In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, the State must address barriers that discourage districts from collaborating across regions and districts, including the use of BOCES—a proven model for shared services.

Districts that choose to utilize BOCES programs and services are often eligible for partial state financial support, primarily for academic programs. Like most state education aid formulas, the amount of aid depends on various factors, including enrollment, student needs, district wealth, and others. A BOCES “aid ratio” is generated from these factors and entitles the district to a percentage of their expenditure on BOCES programs and services in the prior year. However, a unique limitation of BOCES aid is that the aid ratio applies only to the first \$30,000 of staff salaries.

This cap on aid does not restrict salaries but limits the portion of salary eligible for aid reimbursement. This limitation can influence districts' decisions to expand or add new programs, ultimately affecting the range of educational opportunities available to students.

This \$30,000 cap has not been updated in over 30 years, despite significant changes in program demand, diversity, and staff salaries. While career and technical education (CTE) programs remain central, BOCES also offer dual enrollment and other enrichment programs that are funded through this formula.

Public Sector BOCES Lease Terms

Recommendations

- ⦿ **Extend allowable lease terms between BOCES and public sector entities to 20 years, aligning them with private sector lease terms.**



To deliver high-quality education, students need appropriate learning environments. Unlike traditional school districts, BOCES often lease space rather than own property because they are not taxing entities and rely on their component districts for capital project funding. As a result, BOCES may not hold property ownership in the same way as fiscally independent districts.

With increasing demand for BOCES programs, particularly in career and technical education (CTE) and special education, the need for additional space is growing. Current law allows BOCES to lease buildings and property from private sector entities for up to 20 years, with an option to extend by 10 years with the approval from the Commissioner of Education. However, leases with public entities, including school districts, are limited to 10 years.

In some areas of the state, privately owned space is both available and cost effective, but in others, it is prohibitively expensive. Additionally, leased spaces, including schools, often requires substantial modifications to meet the needs of BOCES programs. Extending lease terms would encourage owners to support necessary improvements by securing longer-term tenants, while also providing BOCES and districts more flexibility in financing these projects.

Support Transition to Zero-Emission Buses

The transition to zero-emission school buses marks a significant shift in the delivery of student transportation across New York. To achieve this goal, districts will need substantial administrative and financial support. BOCES of New York State is committed to their own role in implementation as well as assisting component districts through this transition.

This effort requires collaboration among all stakeholders, including energy providers, manufacturers, and transportation contractors. This effort will also require the state to update the way transportation and other aids are calculated and distributed to reflect how transportation services will operate in the future, rather than how it has operated in the past. Early stages of the transition have highlighted several challenges:

- ▶ The power grid lacks sufficient capacity.
- ▶ There is no uniform plan to upgrade and pay for upgrades to the grid.
- ▶ Manufacturers are struggling to meet demand, even at the initial stages of bus purchasing.
- ▶ Current mileage ranges may not be adequate to complete all routes or accommodate double routing even with a fully charged battery.
- ▶ Thus far, voters are reluctant to approve purchases of zero-emission buses, even if subsidies result in the cost being lower than diesel buses.

School districts and BOCES cannot do this on their own. The State needs to use their authority to bring all stakeholders to the table and address legal barriers such as how to address failed bond votes.

Recommendations

- ④ **Adopt a process to address purchases in cases of failed bond votes and budget votes for purchasing zero emission buses.**
- ④ **Assign financial and logistical responsibilities for non-district infrastructure upgrades.**
- ④ **Eliminate administrative barriers to shared transportation services.**
- ④ **Establish funding streams to aid payments for charging “out-of-district” buses.**



Address Critical Workforce Shortages

Recommendations

- Expand current and establish new scholarship and loan forgiveness programs for teachers, SRPs, and health and mental health professionals who commit to five years of service in New York.
- Continue modernizing civil service hiring and promotion requirements.
- Continue to allow public sector retirees to work in BOCES and school districts without a 211 waiver or pension penalty for five years.



Statewide, BOCES and school districts face significant shortages of qualified candidates for essential positions including teachers, mental health professionals, bus drivers, and school-related professionals. A primary challenge to filling these positions is the inadequate pipeline of qualified candidates.

These shortages threaten schools' ability to provide equitable, high-quality education for all students. While the State has made progress with programs to expand these pipelines, further efforts are needed.

State regulated hiring and promotion practices, primarily through the civil service process, also hinder recruitment and retention. Again, although improvements have been initiated, more work is required to address the barriers.

In the meantime, BOCES and districts must focus on retaining current employees and attracting new recruits.



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