



**NEW YORK ASSOCIATION  
FOR PUPIL TRANSPORTATION**

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**NYAPT**

*Our future is riding with us!*

## **Summary of FY 2022 Executive Budget Proposal NYAPT Reaction to School Transportation Proposals**

On January 19, 2021, Governor Cuomo released the 2022 Executive Budget Proposal. This is the first step of the state budget process in our State. Highlights of the proposal relative to Education are below:

- School Aid is increased by \$2.1 billion over fiscal year 2020-21.
- This increase is enabled by applying \$3.8 billion in federal aid to the state budget.
- The state contribution to the FY 2022 budget is decreased by \$2 billion.
- Foundation aid is frozen for the second year in a row at 2019-20 levels.
- A new “Services Aid” category was created, combining 11 expense-based aids.
- This new Services Aid category is reduced by approximately \$683 million (Assembly Ways Mean analysis).
- The 2020-21 “Pandemic Adjustment” in the amount of \$12 billion is restored. Recall this is federal relief money that was used to offset cuts in the 2021 education budget.
- State transportation aid was approved for the Spring 2020 transportation expenses for delivery of food, WIFI and school supplies.
- \$400,000 is included to support the school bus driver instructor program at SED.

We are pleased that education aid is increased, and most school districts are not seeing a reduction in funding for 2021-22. However, this increase is funded on an assumption that New York will receive \$6 billion in federal aid that is not approved by Congress at this writing. The Governor has asked for a top end federal aid package of \$15 billion and, if that happens, some level of state reductions will be restored, and education may actually see a large increase. Federal funding is uncertain at this time.

NYAPT’s reaction to three specific proposals in FY 2022 Executive Budget affecting school transportation services follow:

### **Services Aid**

The FY 2022 Executive Budget proposes that transportation aid be consolidated with 11 existing expense-based aids into a block grant called “Services Aid”. This proposal combines transportation aid with BOCES, textbook, library materials, software and hardware, and others. The total Services Aid amount will be reduced by \$393 million from 2020-21 school year aid level. Federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRRSA) funding will be used to offset this reduction for the 2021-22 school year only.

On its face, this sounds harmless, however, consider this. There is no guarantee of replacement funding for the years beyond 2021-22. The aid reduction is based on 2020-21 state aid that reimburses school districts on 2019-20 approved expenses. This base year is two years old, which places Service Aid at an unrealistic starting point. In addition, the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school fiscal years transportation expenses do not reflect normal operating costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic school closures.

The Executive Budget Proposal’s goal is to cap future growth in these existing aid categories. This is detrimental to school transportation services and to the safety of students we transport. Costs for school transportation are driven by ridership eligibility and operational regulations imposed by state or federal mandate. Transportation services for students with special needs, students in foster care, homeless students and students attending non-public and charter schools are more costly to provide than typical in district-home to school transportation. It is also an unpredictable expense as students may be placed in schools without the home school district’s ability to prior plan and after routing logistics and budgets are developed. The cost of these routes can be expensive,

because they typically travel many miles and have low numbers of student ridership. These routes often require specialized equipment and additional adult assistance beyond the bus driver. Often times, the schedules of these special schools vary and do not coincide with other school schedules. This precludes operational efficiencies similar to those found with typical in-district home to school routes.

The Services Aid category caps school transportation aid for expenses incurred by a school district going forward at 2021-22 levels. When federal funding goes away, school districts will then have to make a choice to offset the state aid loss. They will decide to amend transportation policy and make students ineligible for bus transportation or increase local taxes to pay for the local share of the cost. A tax increase will be difficult given tax cap limitations.

Forcing children off school buses is an undesirable option. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data shows students are 70X safer riding a school bus to and from school when compared with other forms of transportation. Secondly, increasing local taxes is not a popular option as localities and families are already under great financial stress.

We do not see this as a progressive approach as stated in the Executive proposal. Currently, high needs districts receive higher transportation aid levels as a percentage of approved expenses. A Services Aid approach applied to high needs school districts will remove students off the bus to seek alternative modes of travel to and from school. They will have limited options. Students with more resources will find other means to travel to and from school, although not as safe as the school bus. This proposal will hurt students who rely on transportation services the most.

NYAPT urges that the State continue the current 'expense-based' aid model and aid levels for school transportation. Under this funding approach, the State reimburses districts for the costs of transportation at levels between 6.5% and 90% of actual approved costs. In recent years, school districts have taken significant steps to become more efficient and the expense-based approach is working as it was intended. We urge the continuation of 'expense-based' aid for school district transportation, which recognizes the volatility of transportation costs to districts and local taxpayers.

#### **Transportation Aid for Spring 2020 Pandemic Related Costs**

NYAPT appreciates that the Executive Budget provides for state aid reimbursement to schools for expenses related to the delivery of food, supplies and providing WIFI services to students during the 2020 Spring school shutdown. However, it does not go far enough.

NYAPT advocates for transportation aid for expenses to maintain bus fleets and retain staff on "standby" during the school closures. School bus operators spent significant dollars on bus maintenance, staff training and recruiting, and expenses to address new COVID-19 protocols. This was necessary during school shutdowns in order to keep operations in "go" status in anticipation of the reopen schools order. We ask that transportation aid be paid for expenses paid in 2019-20, 2020-21, and in the future, should such school shutdowns occur again. We further recommend that expenses related to contracts with private bus providers be approved for transportation aid as well during school shutdown periods.

#### **SED School Bus Driver Training Funding**

NYAPT thanks the Governor for including \$400,000 in the Executive Budget Proposal for the SED school bus driver training program. This program has proven valuable in protecting our children who ride our school buses every school day by providing up to date and relevant training for our school bus drivers, attendants and monitors.

Our State and school districts face difficult challenges in these unprecedented times. We appreciate the tough decisions our state leaders face in closing a significant state budget gap. NYAPT will work in partnership with the Governor's office and state legislature to share our concerns and educate state leaders on the needs of the school transportation industry in our state. Our goal is to continue to provide safe school transportation service for all students who ride the yellow bus in our State.