



## **School Transportation Aid**

The New York Association for Pupil Transportation (NYAPT) requests State legislative leaders to help New York's school districts and the school transportation industry by reversing a ruling denying state transportation aid during the Spring 2020 state school closures.

On November 6, 2020, the State Education Department (SED) released a memorandum denying the payment of transportation aid for services rendered during the Spring 2020 school closures. The memorandum stated that transportation aid would not be paid for transportation expenses during that period because students were not transported on school buses. The rationale for that decision was that state law does not permit the SED to pay transportation aid when students are not physically transported.

The SED memorandum further stated that the Department will propose Executive Budget language or legislation that if passed, would correct this and pay transportation aid on those expenses during the Spring 2020 school closures. NYAPT has previously issued a memorandum in support of that effort to the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Education.

The decision not to reimburse school districts for costs incurred during the Spring 2020 school closures is financially devastating to school districts. School districts across our state provided in good faith essential services such as food delivery, delivery of important school supplies, computers, and WIFI in support of remote learning. NYAPT issued two memoranda in the Spring of 2020 requesting that aid be paid on expenses related to those functions and further asked for clarification on the state aid payment question for services delivered during that time. To have that decision come out now, months after the services have been provided is unfair to school districts and taxpayers when the services have already been delivered, the money has already been spent and tax levies have already been executed.

It is important to understand that school transportation operations could not be shut down and all related expenses could not be paused when schools were closed last Spring. There are behind the scenes functions that must continue even when students are not transported on school buses. These operations are essential to maintain transportation services and to provide continuity of service assuring that the industry is ready to provide safe and reliable school transportation when the decision to reopen schools is made. These operations include, but are not limited to routine maintenance of buses, bus driver training and requalification, NYSDOT inspections, insurance payments, school bus lease payments, rents and mortgages on garages and associated properties to name a few. Likewise, and for the reasons stated above, contracts with private contractor companies must be honored at some level in order for that industry to remain operational and viable.

Most importantly, failure to pay and support school bus driver staff will most assuredly adversely affect the industry-wide school bus driver shortage which has been exacerbated by a very competitive labor market being driven by a significant demand from package and shipping companies like Amazon, FedEx, UPS and others.

School districts across our state are struggling financially and taxpayers are at tipping point. The State has frozen 20% of state aid due to school districts this state fiscal year and COVID-19 related expenses have negatively affected budgets. The New York School Boards Association estimates that the denial of transportation aid by the SED equates to a loss of \$500 million to school districts across the state. This potential funding cut creates additional financial pressure on school districts to provide safe transportation for the students our industry is entrusted to serve and may lead to many school districts that employ private contractors being unable to provide any transportation service at all due to severe financial hardship. School transportation operations are not adequately funded to begin with in many cases and SED's recent decision to not reimburse school districts adds to the problem.

We ask that you and your fellow state policymakers address this issue legislatively or administratively as soon as possible. School districts, in good faith provided services essential to support the remote education of our students in the Spring of 2020. To deny transportation aid for those functions is financially damaging to school districts and further endangers the future viability of the school transportation industry in our state. The industry is an essential and necessary service for our students, schools and communities – especially for those students and parents with limited resources.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter; NYAPT and all its members stand ready to work with the state legislature, Governor and SED in any way necessary to address this decision.

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