



Four County School Boards Association

2023 State Positions

The Four County School Boards Association, representing 21 school district boards of education in Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, and Yates counties, believes education is more than curriculum and instruction. Today's education additionally includes mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, safety, and access to broadband. These issues coincide with a time of severe financial strain for districts and our state. Four County School Boards Association supports the following positions, which are largely in line with Governor Hochul's 2023 State of the State Address. We seek your assistance in achieving these goals.

Equity and Predictability in Funding

- ◆ Ensure predictability in the budget to help schools achieve fiscal stability by fully funding foundation aid, and modify the formula as needed to ensure equity
- ◆ Provide state aid as agreed for all aidable expenses
- ◆ Cooperate with the federal government to ensure that districts will be able to use ESSA funds, and other funds available to us, to the fullest extent possible
- ◆ Increase Career and Technical Education (CTE) aidable salary levels
- ◆ Ensure continuous funding for school-to-work programs so school districts and BOCES can build sustainable programs

Mental Health in Academics and Social and Emotional Learning for all Students and Staff

- ◆ Provide appropriate services for all students based on their individual needs
- ◆ Provide incentives for successful school/human services agency collaboration
- ◆ Fund teacher and staff development regarding the continuing effect of the pandemic on mental health and stability

Staffing

- ◆ Support the recruitment and retention of all employees through funding and regulatory changes
- ◆ Update Civil service laws and regulations to allow school districts and BOCES to be more flexible in constructing job descriptions and identifying specific qualifications to better meet particular needs

Equitable Internet

- ◆ **Accessibility:**
 - Ensure infrastructure to support adequate broadband reliability, quality, accessibility, and affordability for all families
- ◆ **Affordability:**
 - Offer families the opportunity to purchase communication devices discounted through BOCES
 - Expand E-rate funding to families and organizations to pay for internet access





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Serious educational and social issues have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic. These issues are not new, but current conditions have magnified the challenges of providing the sound, equitable, public education guaranteed by the Constitution of New York State.

Mental Health in Academics and Social and Emotional Learning for all Students and Staff

Mental wellness profoundly impacts student academic success. Providing prevention for all and early identification and intervention for students at risk are critical elements of an effective behavioral management program. Many opportunities exist for staff to learn basic techniques that keep students in school rather than in suspension (a national example is Youth Mental Health First Aid:

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org>). A very successful local example is an on-line course for staff to support and build resiliency in themselves and students created by 15 BOCES staff members in 2016 (https://rise.articulate.com/share/sPm-2McbqIRFqnWCVSDwMkFbuDOud_sc#/). All staff now take the 2-hour course at the beginning of the school year. From 2016 to 2021, the Finger Lakes Secondary School and Wayne Educational Center saw a > 99% decrease in the percentage of students leaving instructional classrooms. Addressing the mental health of our students *is* achievable. Please support teacher training!

Staffing

Everyone who works in a school district is a role model and a teacher of important life skills. The serious shortage of qualified candidates for all positions in rural schools is one of the most critical problems school boards and administrators face.

The Board of Regents and State and Federal Legislators must work with school boards and administrators to allow for success in recruiting qualified candidates. One solution is to update civil service requirements to allow districts greater flexibility in creating job descriptions and filling positions throughout the district. Another solution is to modify the process for certifying qualified teachers including candidates from other states and those entering the profession after another career.

Two specific urgent examples of lack of qualified candidates are:

- 1) the chronic shortage of school bus drivers continues to be a significant problem for our school districts. Recruitment issues include lack of interest in driving for public school districts, time and cost of training and licensing, the hazardous nature of the job with managing the increasing volatility of students, as well as the split-shift and/or part-time status of most driving positions; and
- 2) recruiting SRO's who meet civil service requirements and, in addition, have the unique soft skills necessary to be effective in developing positive relationships with students in the culture and climate of a given building.

Equitable Internet

While grants have been helpful for providing 1 to 1 devices and programming to students, many children are unable to access the internet at home. This lack of access severely limits their ability to complete homework assignments or participate in remote learning. Parents at home also need access to technology and reliable and affordable broadband in order to communicate effectively with teachers and school administrators to support the education of their children. The Four County School Boards Association strongly advocates for governmental assistance to provide reliable and equitable internet access to all children attending public schools, particularly those attending rural public schools.



Four County School Boards Association

Emily Fisher and Julie Nevelizer - Legislative Committee Co-Chairs

Russell Harris - President

Stephen P. Miskell, Ed.D. - Executive Director





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2023 Federal Positions

As advocates for the 39,000 students in the Finger Lakes region of New York State, the members of the Four County School Boards Association set forth the following recommended legislative actions:

- ◆ Denotes items with no direct Federal fiscal impact

Student Issues

Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA/ESEA)

- ◆ Advocate for implementation to follow the intent of the law
- ◆ Eliminate the 95 % test participation rate as a trigger for withholding funding
- ◆ Chronic Absenteeism is a problem and under ESSA school districts are asked to address it. An important component of remedying the situation would be to provide school districts with resources for greater outreach and case management.

Early Childhood

- ◆ Support voluntary, locally-determined early childhood education programs with a separate, dedicated funding stream

Child Nutrition

- ◆ Provide local districts with the flexibility to operate school lunch programs in a way that meets local needs
- ◆ Restore “offered” vs “served” to reduce food waste and cost
- ◇ Support legislation to allow all schools to offer school meals to all children at no charge
- ◇ Improve the area eligibility test to allow summer and afterschool meal sites to participate if 40% of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals
- ◇ Provide funding for summer transportation grants to provide mobile meal trucks

Reaffirm the Role of Local School Boards

- ◆ Ensure the Executive branch does not exceed its authority
- ◆ Recognize the local education agency as the principal democratic governance body in determining how children are educated
- ◆ Restore maximum flexibility to local school boards, freeing them from unnecessary mandates

Funding Issue Corrections by Legislation

School Choice Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

- ◆ Oppose diverting public funds to non-public schools and the charter industry
- ◆ Support existing, evidence based public school choice options
- ◆ Hold all schools receiving public funds to the same financial and academic accountability standards

Fulfill the Promise with Sufficient, Sustained Funding

- ◇ Increase federal investments in Title 1, IDEA , ESSA and related education programs
- ◇ Ensure federal funding flows directly to local school districts rather than through state education departments
- ◇ Oppose funding through competitive grants
- ◇ Prevent another round of across-the-board cuts (sequestration)
- ◇ Retain current funding thru Impact Aid and hold districts harmless from revenue lost through taxes not paid by Sovereign Indian Nations

School Based Medicaid & Healthcare Reform

- ◇ Continue payment of the federal portion for medical services provided to public school students
- ◇ Reject proposals to convert Medicaid to a per-capita grant program
- ◇ Changes to healthcare should include amendments to the Cadillac Tax
- ◇ Simplify the Medicaid billing process for schools to ensure that fewer dollars are spent on administrative costs.





Four County School Boards Association

THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN IS THE KEY TO OUR NATION'S FUTURE

School boards in the Four County region of New York State (Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates Counties) are committed to providing high quality education for all students. The success of this effort is dependent upon a strong, supportive partnership between local communities and the state and federal governments. Most funding for education comes, appropriately, from state and local sources. The federal government's role has historically been to supplement these resources with funding targeted toward specific needs, particularly those that provide equal opportunity and access, and are important resources in support of public education.

An educated citizenry is essential if we are to retain our position as a global leader. To prosper, we must provide the opportunity for all children to learn and be prepared to make meaningful contributions to our nation's success. Reliable and sustained financial support for our public schools, where the majority of our nation's children are educated, is critical. Our schools continue to experience dramatic increases in the cost of health insurance premiums, pension contributions, and services for children with disabilities. We must provide intervention services for "at-risk" students and expanded opportunities for higher achievers. Meeting unfunded or underfunded mandates places an additional demand on local district resources and a burden on local taxpayers. Our New York State districts have the added constraint of budgeting within the tax cap imposed by the Governor and the Legislature. All of these factors have a greater impact on the low-wealth/high-need school districts that make up the Four County area.

We must continue to invest in our future by providing quality public education. Congress must focus on a long-term solution to funding education in America and oppose any policies that would weaken our public schools. This will help ensure our students' success in the global marketplace and also help strengthen America's economy. Necessary funding must accompany all federal mandates. Past promises must be kept!

Support Public Education



Support Academic Achievement



Support Our Children



The Four County School Boards Association is comprised of *mostly rural, low wealth, high need school districts which are* located within the New York State Counties of Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates. Situated in the Finger Lakes, the area educates 35,000 students (NYSED) and represents 262,300 community members (2020 U.S. Census).

The organization strives "to strengthen the leadership skills and advocacy efforts of its members by setting high standards in the areas of board development, legislative activity and opportunities to come together to share concerns and successes." The Association represents its member school boards to legislative and regulatory bodies at the local, state, and national levels.



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BLOOMFIELD CANANDAIGUA CLYDE-SAVANNAH DUNDEE GANANDA GENEVA HONEOYE LYONS
MANCHESTER-SHORTSVILLE MARCUS WHITMAN MARION NEWARK NORTH ROSE-WOLCOTT PENN YAN
PHELPS-CLIFTON SPRINGS SENECA FALLS SODUS SOUTH SENECA WAYNE WAYNE-FINGER LAKES BOCES WILLIAMSON