



## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Chief School Officers Outline 2025-26 Legislative Priorities

Saratoga Springs, January 24, 2025 - Educational leaders and stakeholders from across the region gathered today at WSWHE BOCES to discuss critical priorities for the 2025-2026 school year, including the full funding of Foundation Aid, updated graduation requirements, workforce development challenges, and the transition to zero-emission school buses.

Superintendents, board members, and educators applauded the State’s efforts to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula for the 2023-24 school year, inclusive of hold harmless provisions and minimum increases for all districts, and are grateful that the Executive proposal once again includes those provisions, as well as needed updates to student need and poverty measures. However, participants voiced concerns over the uncertainty surrounding future funding and the ongoing need for adequate and predictable support.

“We are at a pivotal moment for education in New York State,” said Hartford Central School District Superintendent and Chair of the Chief School Officer Advocacy Committee, Andrew Cook.

“While we’ve made significant strides in funding equity, we must ensure that progress is sustainable and adaptable to meet evolving student and district needs.”

#### Key Priorities Discussed:

- Foundation Aid and Financial Planning:** Fully funding the current Foundation Aid formula, factoring in inflation, district fixed costs, and student needs. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of stable, predictable funding for financial planning and the continuation of fully funded expense-based aids.
- Graduation Requirements Transition:** The shift to new graduation standards, including a single diploma model and increased emphasis on civic and financial literacy, was a focal point. Attendees highlighted the need for state-funded professional development, updated curriculum resources, and enhanced BOCES aid reimbursement for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.
- Workforce Development Challenges:** Addressing staffing shortages remains a pressing concern. Proposals included extending retiree work flexibility, streamlining certification for out-of-state and mid-career professionals, and aligning Tier 6 retirement benefits with earlier tiers to support recruitment and retention.
- Transition to Zero-Emission Buses:** With the state-mandated deadlines for zero-emission school buses approaching, attendees outlined barriers such as supply chain delays, funding inadequacies, and voter rejections of bus propositions. Recommendations included amending funding streams, adjusting timelines, and establishing procedures for alternative solutions.

A full document outlining these priorities and specific recommendations is available at [this link](#).

Matt Whitbeck, Co-Owner/Manager, Whitbeck Construction and a Board Member of the Northeast Construction Trades Workforce Coalition, said he fully supports the CSO Advocacy Committee's priorities, in particular increasing the BOCES aid cap on CTE instructors' salaries which would mean greater access to CTE programs for more students and in turn workforce development.

"CTE is a great stepping stone," said Whitbeck. He said he considers hosting interns as an investment for the future. But he said his company, and others in his industry, can't be expected to carry the full financial burden. "If we want to create opportunities for kids to get the right training and be able to find the things they will love to do, we need to ensure systems are supported better so those stepping stones exist."

Alumni Elizabeth Goodspeed, a 2022 grad from Schuylerville, spoke about her experience in the automotive technology program. "The hands-on learning made me want to go further." She gained a scholarship from a local company who paid for her to attend the Nascar Institute in North Carolina. She is now a transmission technician at Mangino Chevrolet in Amsterdam.

"We are grateful to our legislators for their ongoing commitment to supporting education and addressing the challenges faced by school districts," said Dr. Turina Parker, District Superintendent of WSWHE BOCES. "However, there is more work to be done to ensure that every district has the resources and support they need to succeed. We look forward to continuing this important dialogue with our state leaders."

In addition to important policy discussions, attendees had the opportunity to experience firsthand the skills of WSWHE BOCES culinary arts students, who prepared and served to approximately 100 guests. Other CTE programs that participated in the event were the horticulture program which created floral centerpieces, the graphic design program which created the menu, and the criminal justice studies program which directed traffic. SkillsUSA and FFA students sat at tables and told guests about their respective organizations and the opportunities afforded by them.

#### **About WSWHE BOCES:**

WSWHE BOCES provides shared educational programs and services to 31 component school districts in Washington, Saratoga, Warren, Hamilton, and Essex Counties. For more information, visit [WSWHEBOCES.org](http://WSWHEBOCES.org)

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[DSC01621.JPG](#) caption: Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh, SkillsUSA Students Rachel Perkins and Antonella Barone, WSWHE BOCES District Superintendent Turina Parker, and Regent Roger Catania

[DSC02156.JPG](#) caption: Assemblyman Matt Simpson, Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh, Matt Whitbeck, and WSWHE BOCES District Superintendent Turina Parker

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