



**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the
Executive Elementary and Secondary Education Budget
2022-23 City School District of Albany Legislative Priorities
January 26, 2022**

Rebuilding during COVID-19

Beginning in January 2021, the federal government acted swiftly to provide unprecedented levels of pandemic relief to schools nationwide. The City School District of Albany will receive a total of \$46.7 million in one-time federal funds over three years to support operations during, and recovery from, the COVID-19 crisis. American Rescue Plan funding will account for approximately \$32.7 million of our school district's one-time federal funds. We worked with our community last year to develop the following ARP funding priorities for the current school year:

- Social-emotional and mental health supports
- Educational technology
- Safety and security
- HVAC (ventilation/air filtration)
- Accelerated learning and academic support

Our ARP investments will be vital throughout the pandemic and once it finally ends. However, when these one-time federal funds expire, school districts could be facing significant budget challenges as they seek to sustain the badly needed programs and services these funds currently support.

With this fiscal reality in mind, the City School District of Albany is grateful for Governor Hochul's strong commitment to fully funding Foundation Aid in her budget proposal for next fiscal year. The continued support that the governor and the Legislature have consistently demonstrated toward this critical need, their emphasis on equity for all students, and their recognition of school districts' unique needs in making fiscal decisions, is deeply appreciated.

Support for social-emotional and mental health services for students and families

Our school district also is grateful for the state's continued commitment to providing the social-emotional and mental health supports that students need and deserve, especially during the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. Supporting social-emotional and mental health is critical now more than ever amidst the continued uncertainty of COVID-19, with all of the added stressors the pandemic has created throughout society.

In our internal and external community surveys last year to develop our American Rescue Plan funding priorities, all stakeholders identified this area as their top priority. The state's acknowledgement of and support for these priorities is most welcome. Students and families need additional social-emotional and

VISION STATEMENT

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

MISSION STATEMENT

We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

mental health services, and our district needs the support to provide and sustain those services so we can do our part to build and support a healthy, successful community.

Equitable prekindergarten funding for high-needs urban school districts

Our school district continues to ask the state to update its funding formula for prekindergarten, so that districts like Albany that were early implementers of full-day pre-K are treated equitably as New York continues to expand its investments in this critical component of early childhood development.

More than half of our pre-K seats are funded at the old UPK half-day base allocation. Because so many of our pre-K seats are funded under an old formula, our school district invests nearly \$1 million from our local budget to bridge the gap. We strongly advocate raising pre-K funding for school districts that were early implementers of full-day pre-K to be in alignment with more recent funding streams. This would provide equity for districts like ours, allowing us to attract and retain high-quality, certified pre-K teachers so that students receive an even stronger foundation as they begin their academic journey.

Support for English as a New Language and refugee students

Thanks to the support of our one-time federal COVID-19 relief funding in 2021-22, our school district has been able to restore our in-person Albany International Center program this school year. We also have expanded the program to add elementary grades (K-5) for the first time since we launched the program in 2017.

Albany is a resettlement city, and our community and school district experienced significant growth in our refugee and immigrant population in the last decade. With President Biden's prioritization of new immigration policies at the start of his term last year, we have seen the influx of newcomers to our city begin to grow once again. Through October of the current school year, we welcomed 230 new English-language learners to our district – 100 more than during that period a year ago. We anticipate this trend to continue over the next year as well. Funding to maintain and expand the supports this vulnerable student population badly needs will be critical for school districts like Albany moving forward.

Support for expanded Child Safety Zone criteria

We are grateful to the Legislature and to Governor Hochul for their support to update the state's transportation law to expand criteria for Child Safety Zones. This legislation, sponsored by Assemblymember Pat Fahy and Senator Robert Jackson, was an important step that could allow urban school districts like Albany⁶ more options to provide bus service for children who do not currently have a safe route to walk to school.

With the state law now updated, we are advocating for corresponding updates to the state's pupil transportation regulations, with a goal of providing urban school districts with more options for addressing student safety and chronic absenteeism.