



Assemblymember

Anna Kelles

Assembly District 125



Dear Neighbors,

This newsletter continues a review of the fiscal year 2027 approved budget with the [Education, Labor, and Family Assistance \(ELFA\)](#) bill. Note that some items under these topics might end up in what is called the ‘big ugly’ bill, if the item has been a controversial topic during these negotiations. Each year the big ugly is a different one of the policy budget bills. This year it will be the Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental Conservation (TEDE) bill, particularly given that the environmental law rollbacks forced into this year's budget is one of the most controversial items debated this year. It is expected to come out later this week.

State Budget



School Funding and Foundation Aid

Foundation Aid is New York’s primary formula for distributing state operating aid to public school districts. The formula was created after the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court case, which held that the State has a constitutional responsibility to provide students with the opportunity for a sound basic education. Because school districts have very different local tax bases and student needs, the formula is designed to provide more state support to districts with fewer local resources or higher educational needs, such as higher rates of student poverty, homelessness, foster care placement, disability, or English Language Learners.

The formula considers factors such as district wealth, regional education costs, student poverty, enrollment, English Language Learners, and other measures of student need. This approved budget language includes: a statewide increase in Foundation Aid, including a guaranteed minimum 2% increase for every school district. The budget also updates the formula by adding additional weighting for students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care and increasing the weighting for English Language Learners beginning in the 2026–2027 school year. These changes

are intended to better account for the additional resources some districts need to support students facing greater economic or educational challenges.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Early Childhood Education

The budget continues state support for Universal Pre-Kindergarten and early childhood education programs statewide and updates how portions of Universal Pre-K funding are calculated and distributed. Beginning in the 2026–2027 school year, the State will calculate separate funding amounts for three-year-old and four-year-old prekindergarten programs. The legislation also changes how much funding districts receive for each student by using a formula connected to existing school aid calculations and prior-year student enrollment. These changes are intended to create a more standardized and predictable funding structure as prekindergarten programs continue to expand across the state.

The legislation continues the State’s phased expansion of access to full-day prekindergarten for eligible four-year-olds, with all school districts expected to provide access by the 2028–2029 school year.

School districts may provide UPK directly through district-operated classrooms, through BOCES, or through partnerships with eligible agencies, including licensed or registered child care centers, family day care and group family day care providers, nursery schools, Head Start programs, and certain other early childhood providers. However, districts are not required to contract with every existing provider in their community, and providers must meet State Education Department standards and district contracting requirements related to curriculum, staffing, reporting, inspections, and program operations.

Some child care advocates and researchers have documented that school-based UPK expansion can reduce enrollment and revenue for community-based child care providers, especially those that rely on four-year-old enrollment to help support infant, toddler, and mixed-age care, which is typically more expensive to provide. The impact of this expansion will likely depend on how individual school districts implement it locally.

School Infrastructure and Zero-Emission School Buses

The legislation allows certain renewable energy projects to qualify as part of school district capital construction aid calculations, which may allow school districts to receive state building aid support for approved renewable energy investments connected to school facilities.

The budget also delays the State mandate requiring school districts to purchase or lease only zero-emission school buses from July 1, 2027 to July 1, 2032. In addition, the deadline requiring school districts to fully transition to operating only zero-emission school bus fleets is delayed from 2035 to 2040.

Bell-to-Bell Smartphone Restriction Implementation Funding

The bell-to-bell restriction on student use of smartphones and other internet-enabled personal devices during the school day was enacted in last year's budget. This year's budget includes \$13.5 million in implementation funding to help school districts comply with the requirement, including costs associated with purchasing phone storage systems such as locked pouches, lockers, or storage cabinets, developing local enforcement policies, training staff, and addressing other logistical and administrative implementation needs.

Evidence-Based Mathematics Instruction

In 2025, NYS Education Department (NYSED) released a series of "numeracy briefs" and launched statewide guidance focused on evidence-based mathematics instruction. NYSED also released a new PreK–12 Mathematics Curriculum Review Guide intended to help districts review and select math curricula aligned with the State's learning standards and instructional priorities.

This budget language builds on NYSED's work by requiring the Department to formally develop and publish statewide evidence-based best practices for kindergarten through fifth grade mathematics instruction by January 1, 2027. School districts will be required to annually review their math curriculum and instructional practices and, beginning in September 2027, certify to NYSED that they align with the State's evidence-based guidance. The legislation does not require districts to adopt a single statewide curriculum, but it does establish a statewide framework intended to encourage the use of instructional methods and interventions that NYSED determines are supported by research and evidence.

New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship

The budget expands eligibility for the New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship, a financial aid program designed to support students pursuing associate degrees in high-demand workforce fields at public higher education institutions in New York.

Under the updated language, the scholarship is no longer limited only to SUNY and CUNY community colleges and may now apply more broadly to approved associate degree programs at New York public institutions of higher education. Eligible high-demand fields currently include areas such as advanced manufacturing, engineering, technology, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, nursing and allied health professions, renewable energy, and teaching in shortage areas.

The scholarship is structured as a “last-dollar” financial aid program, meaning it is intended to cover remaining tuition, fees, books, and certain educational supplies after other grant aid is applied. The legislation also creates an exception allowing students who already hold a postsecondary degree to still qualify if they are returning to pursue an approved nursing associate degree program.

Early Childhood Educator Scholarship Eligibility

The budget expands the Masters-in-Education Teacher Incentive Scholarship Program so it also applies to students pursuing a master’s degree leading to a career in early childhood education, not only public elementary or secondary education. Recipients must still meet the program’s requirements, including teaching full-time in New York for five years after completing the degree. This is intended to help recruit and retain more early childhood educators.

New York State Music Grant Fund

The budget renames the “New York State Musical Instrument Revolving Fund” as the “New York State Music Grant Fund” and broadens its purpose. Instead of focusing only on loans, leases, or purchases of musical instruments, the fund may now support grants to nonprofit symphony orchestras and other nonprofit musical organizations, including organizations providing music education in schools or BOCES.

Assistance for Aged, Blind, and Disabled New Yorkers


The budget includes modest increases to the monthly personal needs allowance for aged, blind, and disabled New Yorkers living in certain care settings. The personal needs allowance is the amount of money individuals are allowed to keep each month for personal expenses such as clothing, toiletries, transportation, phone service, and other daily needs. Advocates have argued for years that these allowances have remained far too low and have not kept pace with inflation or the real cost of living.

Beginning January 1, 2026, the allowance increases from \$186 to \$191 for people receiving family care, from \$213 to \$219 for people receiving residential care, and from \$255 to \$262 for people receiving enhanced residential care. Beginning in 2027, these amounts will also increase based on any federal SSI cost-of-living adjustment.

Housing Preservation and Homelessness Programs

This budget language lets the State use housing-related reserve funds to support programs that repair and preserve affordable homes. The funds can also be used to help rural and neighborhood housing organizations operate, provide rental assistance, fund supportive housing for people with higher needs, and support programs that prevent homelessness. These programs can help stabilize tenants, protect existing affordable housing, support local nonprofit housing providers, and reduce the risk that people fall into homelessness when housing costs are already too high.

In good health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna R. Kelles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a distinct "R".

Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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