

# LOSING GROUND

MODEST IMPROVEMENTS IN THE  
FINANCIAL CONDITION OF NEW  
YORK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE NOT  
KEEPING PACE WITH THE NEEDS  
OF THE CHILDREN THEY SERVE



SEVENTH ANNUAL SURVEY  
OF NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL  
SUPERINTENDENTS ON  
FINANCIAL MATTERS

OCTOBER 2017

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## Methodology

The Council conducted its seventh annual survey of New York State school district superintendents on financial matters between July 25<sup>th</sup> and August 21<sup>st</sup>. The survey was conducted online through K12 *Insight*, a corporate partner of the Council. A total of 322 superintendents submitted complete responses, a response rate of 47 percent.

Here are the regions used in the report:

**Long Island:** Nassau, Suffolk Counties

**Lower Hudson Valley:** Putnam, Rockland, Westchester Counties

**Mid-Hudson Valley:** Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, Ulster Counties

**Capital Region:** Albany, Columbia, Greene, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren, Washington Counties

**Mohawk Valley:** Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Schoharie Counties

**Central New York:** Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tompkins Counties

**North Country:** Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence Counties

**Southern Tier:** Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga Counties

**Finger Lakes:** Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates Counties

**Western New York:** Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagara Counties

Robert Lowry, the Council’s Deputy Director for Advocacy, Research and Communications, is the principal author of this report. The report’s cover was developed by Dena Gauthier, Senior Graphic Designer for the Council.

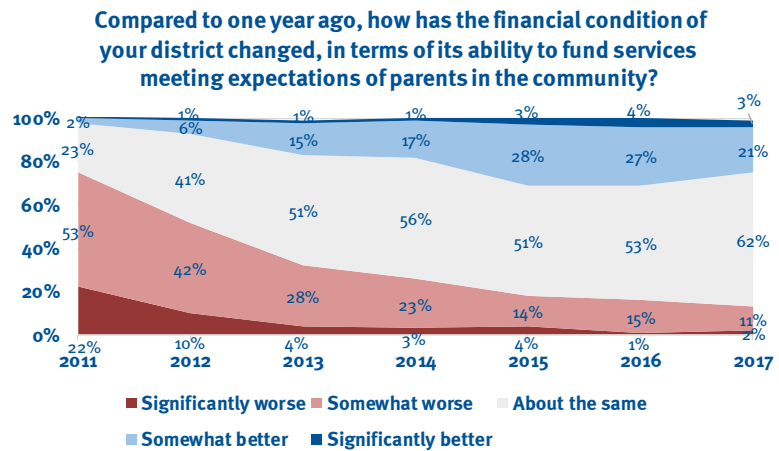
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Modest improvements in the financial condition of New York’s public schools are not keeping pace with the needs of the children they serve.
- Across multiple questions in the Council’s seventh annual survey of superintendents on financial matters, rising concern about the needs of students is apparent. For example, 45% of superintendents responded that capacity to help students with non-academic needs (including health and mental health) is a significant problem, more than for any other item.
- Most dramatically, the percentage of superintendents identifying increasing mental health-related services for students as a funding priority surged by 17 percentage points, from 35% in 2016 to 52% this year.
- Asked to rank three top priorities should funding beyond what would be needed to maintain current services and meet mandates become available, increasing mental health-related services emerged as the top priority among superintendents statewide. In the previous six annual surveys, increasing extra academic help for struggling students led all priorities.
- In open-ended comments, superintendents attributed the increasing priority on mental health services to growing needs among children and families, arising from the effects of poverty and economic insecurity and from the influence technology, including social media.
- Findings on school district financial condition can be summarized as “stable to modestly positive.” For example, for the third consecutive year, more superintendents reported their school district’s financial condition had improved rather than worsened – but only by 24% to 13%, with both figures lower than in 2016. 62 percent of superintendents reported no change in financial condition, an increase from 53 percent in 2016.
- Importantly, the share of superintendents reporting improvement in financial condition has *never* risen above 31% in any of the Council’s seven annual surveys going back to 2011.
- Similarly, asked how their district budget for the current year had affected specific student services, more superintendents reported positive impacts than negative. But never in any of the seven annual surveys has a statewide majority of superintendents reported a positive impact for any student service.
- The percentage of superintendents expressing optimism about their district’s ability to fund adequate services looking ahead three years increased by nine points, but moved only from 20% to 29%. 70% of superintendents remain pessimistic, including 7% of superintendents who responded that their districts are not able to fund adequate services now. These districts are predominantly rural, small, and higher in student poverty.
- Asked to identify *any factors* causing concern in thinking about their districts’ financial outlook, superintendents most frequently name inadequate state aid (90%), increasing needs of students (84%), expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs, such as pensions and health insurance (83%), the tax cap (81%), and additional costs arising from state and federal mandates (70%).
- Asked to name *the one factor* which causes them the *greatest concern* in thinking about their districts’ financial outlook, 50% of superintendents cited the possibility of inadequate state aid (up from 44% in 2016), 16% named the tax cap (down from 28% in 2016), 15% picked increasing student needs (up from 10% in 2016), and 11% chose expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs.
- The most positive financial finding in the survey is that the percentage of superintendents expressing concern about their districts’ reliance upon reserves to pay recurring costs declined from 64% to 38%, reflecting roughly a 20-point shift of superintendents from “somewhat concerned” to “not concerned, our reliance on reserves is limited.”
- 34% of superintendents responded that finding an adequate number of qualified teachers is a significant problem, the second highest percentage for any item, after capacity to help students with non-academic needs. 72% of North Country superintendents identified finding qualified teachers as a significant problem, as did 59% of Southern Tier superintendents and 51% of rural superintendents.

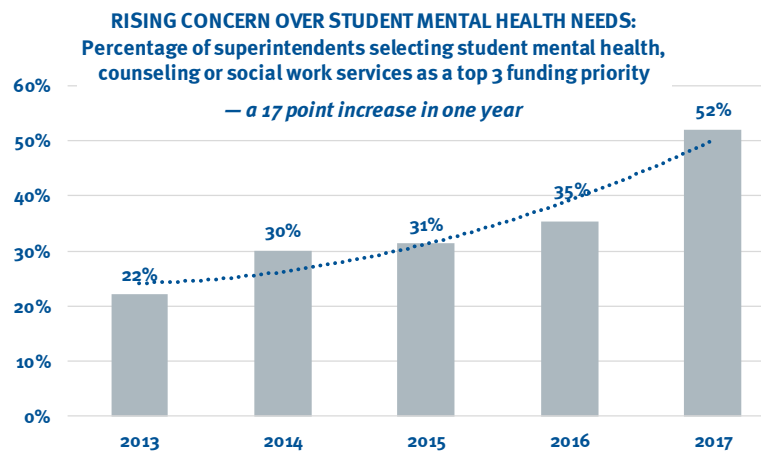
## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Improvements in the financial condition of New York’s public schools are not keeping pace with the needs of the children they serve. That is the central finding of the 2017 survey on school finances by the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

For the third year in a row, more superintendents told the Council that the financial condition of their districts improved rather than worsened over the prior year. But the figures are very low: 24 percent reported improvement, 13 percent reported worsening financial condition. Both figures are down from the year before, while the percentage of superintendents reporting no change in their districts’ financial condition rose, from 53 percent to 62 percent.



But the most striking results from the Council’s 2017 survey reveal growing concern about the needs of children and ability of schools to meet them. Most dramatically, the percentage of superintendents identifying increasing student mental health-related services as a funding priority rose from 35 percent in 2016, to 52 percent this year.



The survey yielded other signs of mounting concern among school district leaders about the needs of school-children. For example, capacity to help students with non-academic needs was cited as a “significant problem” by 45 percent of superintendents, more than any other item.

A Mohawk Valley superintendent observed,

*While the funding and educational models of our schools have largely stayed the same, the needs of students and communities have continued to increase. We cannot simply maintain the status quo due to the increasing mental health, special education, and ELL [English Language Learner] needs while the fiscal conditions and employment prospects of our communities continue to worsen.*

### Some Improvement in Financial Outlook – But Not Much

Gains in current financial condition attest that recent increases in state aid have helped some districts begin to recover from damage they endured during the Great Recession and its immediate aftermath. But *never* in any of the Council’s now seven annual surveys have more than a third of superintendents said their districts’ financial condition improved over the preceding year. So it is probable that the ability of many districts to support adequate services deteriorated badly in the first year or two of the Council’s surveys, with little recovery in the years since.

In the same vein, Council surveys have also asked how annual district budgets have affected specific student services. More superintendents now anticipate positive effects rather than negative, but *never* in the seven years has a majority of superintendents statewide reported improvement in *any* area.

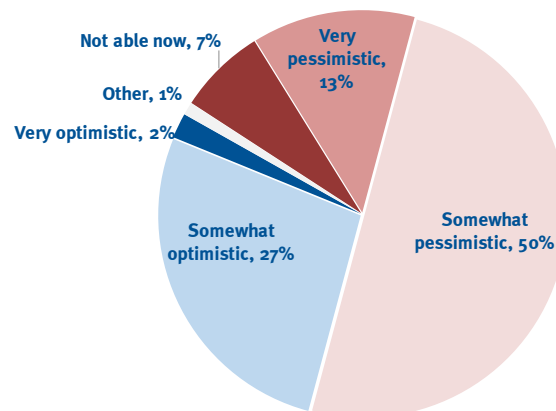
A Capital Region superintendent wrote,

*We are still recovering from the 2008 economic downturn where staffing and programmatic cuts were extremely deep. We are trying to add back a little each year, but still well below where we were in 2008. This has created huge inequities in available student opportunities compared with our wealthier suburban neighbors. While we are getting by financially, we are not back to pre-2008 staffing levels, even ten years later with enrollment levels remaining roughly the same. This opportunity gap is a loss for our students and their futures.*

The positive impact of state aid increases averaging 5.5 percent over the past four years (excluding New York City) has been diminished by the impact of the school property tax cap. Advertised as a “2 percent tax cap,” the base for the cap has been below 2 percent for each of the last four years, reaching a low of 0.12 percent for 2016-17.

While there have been modest advances in current financial condition, pessimism about the future remains prevalent. The survey yielded a nine point increase in the percentage of superintendents reporting that they are somewhat or very optimistic about the ability of their districts to fund adequate services looking ahead three years or so. But that merely took the share of superintendents professing any degree of optimism from 20 percent to just 29 percent. Seventy percent of superintendents remain pessimistic in their extended outlook, including 7 percent who said their districts cannot fund adequate services *now*, the equivalent of roughly 50 districts perhaps in a state of educational insolvency.

Thinking ahead 3 years or so, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about whether your district will be able to fund programs and services adequate to the needs of your students?



Asked what factors cause concern in considering the financial prospects of their schools, five items stand out among all the responses – inadequate state aid, the tax cap, increasing student needs (including students in poverty, students for whom English is not their first language, and students with disabilities), expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs such as pensions and health insurance, and costs arising from state or federal mandates, each picked by at least 70 percent of superintendents.

Asked to name the one factor evoking the greatest worry, 50 percent of superintendents cited the prospect of inadequate state aid, followed by the tax cap, chosen by 16 percent. Presumably reflecting the increase in the cap from near zero a year ago to 1.26 percent this year and to a level neighboring 2 percent in the year to come, the share of superintendents citing the impact of the tax cap as their greatest financial worry declined from 28 percent 16 percent.

**Which issues cause concern in thinking about the financial outlook for your district?**

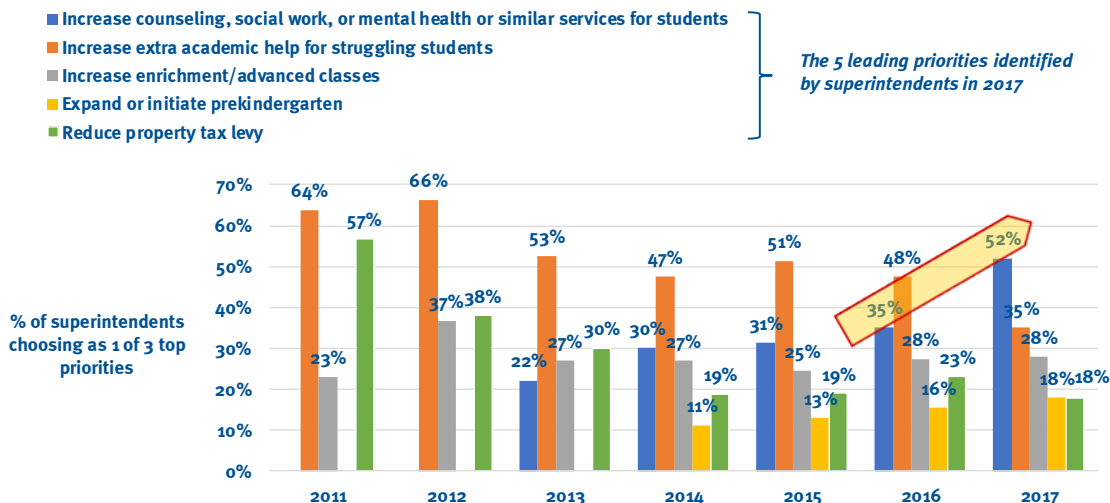
	A concern	Greatest concern
Inadequate state aid	90%	50%
The tax cap	81%	16%
Increasing needs of students	83%	15%
Expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs (e.g., pensions, health insurance)	84%	11%
Declining student enrollment	48%	5%
Other (Please specify)	10%	2%
Additional costs arising from state or federal	70%	1%
Increasing student enrollment	7%	0%
Costs due to students enrolling in charter schools	10%	0%
Poor or uncertain community support for schools	7%	0%

**Mounting Concern Among School Leaders About the Needs of Children**

Again, however, more dramatic than any changes in district financial condition is the rising concern over student needs revealed in the Council’s latest survey.

The Council began surveying New York’s school superintendents about district finances in 2011. Every year, the Council has asked, if your district were to receive more funding than what would be required to meet mandates and maintain current services, what would be your top three priorities for additional support? In the first six annual surveys, expanding extra academic help for struggling students was the leading priority every year. This year, however, it was passed by increasing student mental health, counseling, social work and related services. The share of superintendents choosing mental health-related services as a priority surged by 17 points in one year – from 35 percent in 2016 to 52 percent in 2017.

**If your district were to receive an increase in funding beyond what would be needed to fund state mandates and your current level of services, what would be your top three priorities for the use of that funding?**



Growing concern over the needs of students emerges in other findings from the Council survey:

- “Capacity to help to students in meeting non-academic needs, including, for example, health and mental health issues” was cited by 45 percent of superintendents as a significant problem – more than any other issue listed.
- The share of superintendents citing increasing student needs as their greatest concern in thinking about their district’s financial prospects rose from 10 percent to 15 percent from last year to this, more than for any other factor.
- As evidence that improving mental health-related services has been an growing concern, the percentage of superintendents reporting that annual district budgets have had a positive impact on that program area increased more than for any other service, both over the past year and over the last three years, more than tripling, from 11 percent in 2014 to 34 percent this year.
- Only 15 percent of superintendents responded that “Substance abuse (including opioid abuse) by students or family members of students” is not at all a problem for their districts, a lower figure than for all but two other circumstances posed. In three upstate regions, 5 percent of superintendents or fewer said that substance abuse was not at all a problem.
- Two-thirds of superintendents chose at least one student support option as one of their three funding priorities, and nearly half picked two.

Emphasis on the growing needs of schoolchildren among the survey’s responding superintendents is no surprise to Council staff. It has become evident through conversations and other anecdotal exchanges over the past year or so. But it does raise the question, why the growing concern now, and especially the priority on mental health services?

Three possible explanations for the increased focus on student needs are: (1) Needs are in fact increasing; (2) Access to services has been reduced; (3) Perhaps schools have progressed in addressing other priorities, allowing them attach greater emphasis to student needs.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Capital Region Small City:** My belief is due to a steady increase in poverty, parents/guardians are more stressed at home which causes children to come to school stressed, carrying a lot more anxiety than normal. They’re anxious over their home life, where their next meal is coming from and trauma they suffer due to poverty. No data to back this up, just my experience dealing with my population on a daily basis.

**Western New York Rural:** My rural district has made it a priority to hire a school social worker in order to better address the growing number of students with families in crisis. We have counselors and school psychologists but are finding there is not enough time to address the growing number of families in crisis that impede a student’s ability to be successful. I attribute this to increasing poverty, lack of adequate local and county mental health services as well as increases in the number of families dealing with the difficulties of addiction to drugs and alcohol.

**Long Island Suburb:** I think that the surge in the influence of technology on our society is a significant factor in the increase in mental health needs of our children. This can be linked to three technology-related factors. First, the unprecedented access to unfiltered information. This information overload leads to confusion for many youngsters. Second, technological advancements have increased the expectations for the pace of our lives. Finally, and most importantly, technology tends to isolate children. Video gaming and social media (I like to call it anti-social media) all too often cause our children to be in virtual lock boxes.

**Finger Lakes Rural:** In our rural Finger Lakes community, the population of families eligible for a free or reduced price lunch grows every year. In my experience here, the need for mental health services for students is directly proportional to the number of families receiving social services. The distance between those of means and those on public assistance appears to be growing wider on a variety of scales including school readiness, academic stamina, coping skills and social-emotional development.

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

**North Country Rural:** Public education has as much to gain from improving the lives of children outside of school and early in life as it does from burdensome demands based on schools and classrooms. Until we are willing to direct our energy, attention, and resources to critical areas that are needed before children can be ready for schooling -- areas like health care, housing, family stability, high quality child care, early literacy programs -- we will always feel as if we are paddling upstream. Investing in America's children in all areas of their lives will pay dividends many times over -- in successful public schools, and in building the kind of hopeful society we wish to be.

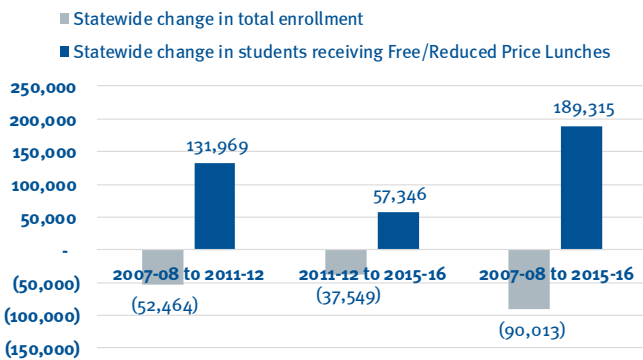
**Long Island Suburb:** Even with the decline in enrollment, the students require many more support services than in the past. Coupled with the fact that 1 out of every 3 students is on Free or Reduced Lunch, the cost of education is growing as well.

While acknowledging that the third explanation may apply for some districts, superintendents dismiss it as a significant consideration. More do cite reductions in services as a factor, but most believe that the needs of children coming to their schools are greater.

On several measures, the state of New York's children is better than for that of the nation as a whole and has been improving. But one indicator of growing mental health difficulties is that the percentage of New York's adolescents reporting a "major depressive episode" increased from 7.3 percent in 2011-12 to 11.9 percent in 2014-15.<sup>1</sup>

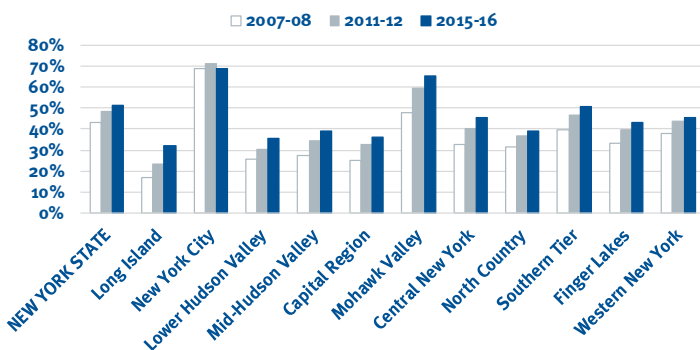
If students needs have been growing, especially mental health needs, then it must be asked, why? In discussion, superintendents most often cite two factors: rising levels of poverty and economic insecurity among school families and the influence of technology. Some also mention the opioid epidemic and general economic anxiety felt by families.

**Poverty among schoolchildren has been increasing faster than total enrollment has been declining**



SOURCES: Kids' Well-Being Indicator Clearinghouse, NYS Council on Children and Families (FRPL) and NYS Education Department School Aid data (enrollment)

**Percentages of Public School Students Receiving Free/Reduced Price Lunches**



SOURCE: Kids' Well-Being Indicator Clearinghouse, NYS Council on Children and Families (FRPL) and NYS Education Department School Aid data (enrollment)

New York's unemployment rate has come down sharply since 2011, the first year of the Council's survey. But total employment upstate has barely moved, suggesting either a decline in total population, reduced participation in the labor force, or both. In any event, childhood poverty has remained above what it was before the Great Recession. While overall enrollment declined by roughly 90,000 students statewide since 2007-08, the number of students from families poor enough to qualify for the federal school lunch program has increased by nearly 190,000 students. The share of children participating in the lunch program increased in every region outside New York City, both in the aftermath of the financial system collapse and ensuing recession (2007-08 through 2011-12) and again in the years since (2011-12 through 2015-16).

Technology is cited as affecting children in two ways – directly and through the parenting they receive. One North Country superintendent referenced a September 2017 *Atlantic* article whose title asked, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" The article notes encouraging trends: declines in smoking, drug use, and alcohol consumption among teenagers. But it observes "Rates of teen depression



and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011,” and explains that 2012 was a tipping point, the year that the share of Americans with smartphones passed 50 percent. It reports surveys by the National Institute on Drug Abuse finding, “Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy,” and “There’s not a single exception. All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness.”<sup>2</sup>

Another superintendent from the same region recounted observing two mothers interacting with infant children, one absorbed by her phone, the other interacting continuously her child. She concluded, asking, “Which child will be better prepared for school?”

This report cannot resolve the validity of reasons behind the rising concern cited by superintendents about the needs of the children they serve. But the concerns revealed in the survey echo conversations with superintendents, other educators and others working with children. Surveys of the public at-large suggest that wider recognition of the need to tackle out-of-school impediments to in-school success. *Phi Delta Kappan’s* “49<sup>th</sup> Annual Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools” found Americans supporting an assortment of “wrap-around” services to students who do not have access to them elsewhere, including after-school programs (92 percent), mental health services (87 percent) and general health services (79 percent). Support was even greater among New Yorkers than in the nation as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

Through our surveys, the Council seeks to illuminate problems confronting schools as a first step toward developing remedies. Last year the Council proposed a four-part “financial sustainability agenda” to address the tenuous financial circumstances our survey identifies among many school systems:

- Update and phase-in the Foundation Aid formula enacted in 2007 following the end of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity school finance litigation, to give schools more adequate, equitable and predictable state funding.
- Make adjustments to the property tax cap to support multi-year planning, including for example, making the cap a straight 2 percent, plus or minus exclusions, rather than the current lesser of 2 percent or change in the Consumer Price Index over the prior calendar year.
- Take steps to help schools reduce or control costs or produce more impact for children within existing resources.
- Give schools access to reserves like those available to local governments, starting with a reserve for teacher pension obligations.

A theme in the Council’s advocacy is that, if the state is not going to change rules which drive up costs while restricting the ability to raise local revenue to meet those costs, then it must fund those rules – by providing adequate increases in state aid to all districts. The Council will be refining our sustainability agenda before the start of the 2017-18 legislative session.

The Council has not formulated complete recommendations to address the mounting concern over growing needs of schoolchildren or the needs for mental health services in particular. But a beginning approach is to ask, who should do what?: What should the Council do to support its members in

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Western New York Rural:** We do not have the resources to support the social and emotional challenges of students and families. We would need to reduce academic programs in order to support additional non-academic programs.

**Southern Tier City:** Students coming to kindergarten are bringing significant levels of need both academic and social/emotional. The lack of Mental Health Services in counties has put the burden of provision of these services on the schools and we are ill prepared to deliver the level of service children and families need. As a result students fail to perform and lag academically and soon enough exhibit significant deficits in achievement that make them qualify for Special Education services which is burgeoning and very expensive. Add the difficulty in finding qualified and capable teachers with the right certifications and we are heading for a crisis.

**North Country Rural:** This is a significant issue for [my district]. The perfect alignment in small rural communities of poverty, limited access to quality care and difficulty getting there. We also have limited access to training for parents on how to interact with young children. This is a result of poverty, multiple jobs to make ends meet, limited quality child care and families that are not together with extended members under one roof. We are also seeing a drug epidemic and the results being manifested in children who fall to a low priority on the "care spectrum."

We are also seeing the first generation of children who have parents with access to technology so the lack of socialization of young children is rampant. I observed two mothers caring for children at the same time. Both involved a diaper change. One mother said nothing to the child, took care of the task and continued to follow Facebook on her cell phone. There was limited visual contact with the child and no verbal contact. The second mother talked to the child through the entire process... The two interactions were at the opposite end of the extremes for the parenting we see when we get students entering. Which of these two children will be ready for school in 3 years?

**Western New York Rural:** I am concerned about how federal decisions may impact our school district. Health care and Medicaid changes could have disastrous financial implications on public school districts. I hope our legislators are prepared to make tough decisions on services and mandates, because we will not be able to absorb increased costs at the local level.

addressing these issues? What should school districts do? What should the state and federal governments be requested to do?

A continuing series of mental health summits convened with leadership by the New York State School Boards Association and participation by the Council and other groups is promoting discussions of what schools and districts can do. The Council's survey findings suggest that our priorities should include identifying effective practices among districts to share with members and conveying other information about how schools can help families access existing services.

On the advocacy front, the findings should not be taken as an argument for creating a new School Aid categorical formula for mental health services. While just over half of superintendents indicated that increasing mental health services would be a priority for their schools, nearly as many identified other priorities. Rather, part of updating the Foundation Aid formula should be to reassess the adequacy of factors aimed at assuring adequate support in addressing pupil needs in general.

One of the greatest advocacy priorities, however, will be to preserve what schools and families have now. Potential action on health care funding at the federal level could have catastrophic consequences. All the major proposals thus far to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act would cut Medicaid funding to New York State by billions of dollars. Those cuts could directly affect schools, by forcing the state to curtail Medicaid support which schools rely upon now to pay for screening, health, mental health, and special education services for students.

Even more alarming, the cuts would create massive state budget deficits, compelling funding reductions for many state services, including School Aid.

Finally, the Cuomo Administration has estimated that the proposals would jeopardize health care coverage for 2.7 million New Yorkers. Children comprise 42 percent of the state's Medicaid beneficiaries, suggesting over one million of New York's children could lose access to health care.

As advocates for children, school leaders cannot stay on the sidelines in debates over health care in the nation's capital.

## OVERALL FISCAL CONDITION

The Council's annual school finance surveys have asked superintendents three questions broadly assessing the overall financial condition of their school districts:

- Compared to one year ago, how has the financial condition of your district changed, in terms of its ability to fund services meeting expectations of parents in the community?
- To what extent, if at all, are you concerned that your district is relying upon reserves and fund balance to pay for recurring operating costs?
- Thinking ahead three years or so, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about whether your district will be able to fund programs and services adequate to the needs of your students.

The results for 2017 reveal limited improvements in overall financial condition, but a crucial point is that in none of the Council's now seven annual finance surveys has more a third of superintendents ever reported improvement in their districts' financial condition.

The first of the Council's finance surveys was conducted in the summer of 2011, months after the largest total dollar reduction in state aid to education ever enacted. That year, 75 percent of school superintendents reported their district's financial condition had worsened and 80 percent reported their district budgets had eliminated teaching positions that year.

It was not until the 2015-16 school year that more superintendents indicated their district's financial condition had improved rather than worsened, by 31 percent to 18 percent, with the remaining 51 percent anticipating no change in financial condition.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Central New York Suburb:** Holding onto existing programs has become the measuring bar of a budget win. Status quo cannot become the norm. Our students face a world that requires a new generation of learning opportunities that flat funding won't support.

**Finger Lakes Rural:** We are required to make the budget work each year. Doing so should NOT suggest that we receive adequate or equitable state aid. Our board of education will always find a way to make the dollar and cents of each budget year work because we are required to do so. Those efforts don't mean that the district is functioning at adequate, appropriate, or acceptable levels. For example, we have been without a school business official, transportation director, and facilities director for the last 5 years. Our board of education has supported decisions from our administrators to allocate scarce funding to teaching and learning while forgoing these needed positions. We are only able to do so because we have hard working, dedicated, committed, and completely vested employees. Just because we make it work, doesn't mean that it is working!

**Mid-Hudson Valley Suburb:** Our district has developed several programs to help our students learn and grow, but have been able to fund very few. We still develop these programs (enrichment, readiness, early literacy), but have been unable to fund them to the extent we would like. As a result, our status quo is fine, but we are not improving as rapidly as we know we can. It is entirely due to not receiving sufficient funding in state aid and all the financial demands that are mandated, but not funded. We want to move forward, but are forced to stand still in areas we know need improvement. Every year's budget is frustrating. We are working hard to ensure our students' best education, but are not getting the financial support our students and staff deserve.

**Lower Hudson Valley Rural:** This was the first year in a number of years that we were able to add staff to address our need for mental health supports for students and educational assistance for staff, parents and students.

**North Country Rural:** Small rural school districts provide strong core educational experiences, but without additional state aid we are unable to provide the breadth of opportunities found in larger schools and suburban school districts. Our tax base is so small that a 2% increase doesn't cover annual cost increases in contracts and benefits to faculty and staff.

**IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

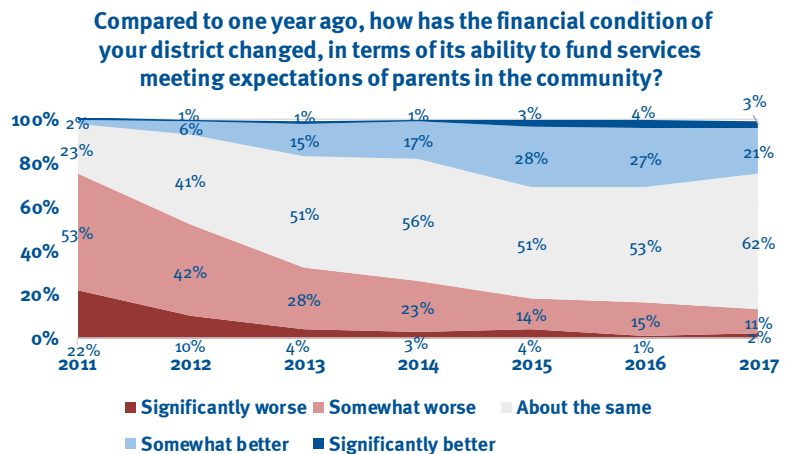
**Mohawk Valley City:** We live in an economically depressed area. State aid accounts for approximately 75% of our revenue. Our ability to knock on taxpayers’ doors is extremely limited, and even if we were able to exceed the tax cap, we wouldn’t be able to garner enough funding to offset our dependency on state aid to any great degree. Foundation aid needs to increase, and the entire mechanism for funding schools needs to be addressed differently. Children born and raised in this region should not be given a "basic" education while those raised in more prosperous regions have enriching opportunities as a result of geography. This creates an educational class system of sorts that furthers the gap between the rich and the poor.

**Southern Tier Rural:** We have no levers to pull on the revenue side of the budget. Our only option is on the expenditure side of the budget and since more than 2/3 of expenditures are personnel, our only real area with even limited flexibility is in the area of staffing.

**Capital Region Suburb:** [What the public needs to know] Balancing needs of students with competition for funding and the affordability of the school budget for the community. We need to change the way schools are funded so that it is not a conflict for community members to support a solid educational program.

**Current Condition**

As reported by superintendents responding to the Council’s finance survey, the overall financial condition of school districts in New York State appears to be mostly stable. The percentage of superintendents reporting that the financial condition of their school district is “about the same” as a year ago increased from 53 percent in 2016 to 62 percent this year, while percentages reporting either improvement or deterioration decreased.



Again, a key point in reviewing the history of responses to this question is that in each of the Council’s now seven annual surveys, *no more than 31 percent of superintendents have ever reported improvement in their school district’s financial condition.* This year, only 24 percent reported improvement, down from 31 percent in both 2015 and 2016.

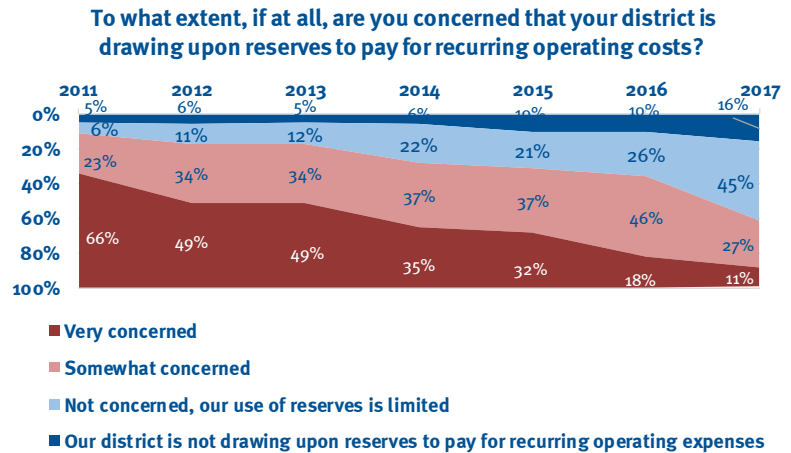
The stabilization in this year’s results probably reflects broad trends in school revenues in New York. The increase in School Aid in the 2017-18 state budget was smaller than in other recent years – 4.2 percent, compared to an average of 5.9 percent in the prior three years. But the allowable levy growth factor in the school property tax cap for this year was much greater this year than a year ago: 1.26 percent, up from 0.12 percent.

Consistent with the above interpretation, superintendents leading high poverty districts – those typically most heavily reliant upon state aid – were *two times more likely* than all respondents to have said their district’s financial condition worsened (26 percent versus 13 percent). Superintendents of more property tax-dependent, low poverty districts were nearly twice likely as all superintendents to see improvement (45 percent versus 24 percent).<sup>4</sup>

## Reliance on Reserves

One bright spot in the survey’s findings on financial condition is a drop in the percentage of superintendents reporting concern about their districts’ reliance on reserves to fund recurring costs.

In the Council’s first finance survey (in 2011), 89 percent of superintendents professed concern about reliance on reserves, including 66 percent who said they were “very concerned.” In ensuing years, there had been a steady movement of superintendents from “very concerned” to “somewhat concerned,” so that a year ago, only 18 percent of superintendents remained “very concerned.” But nearly two-thirds of superintendents still expressed some concern.



This year, overall concern about reliance on reserves to fund recurring costs fell from 64 percent to 38 percent, with most of the decline resulting from superintendents moving from “somewhat concerned,” to “not concerned, our reliance on reserves is limited.”

Still, in open-response comments submitted to our survey and in other anecdotal exchanges, superintendents commonly do share worries about the need for reserves. For example, a Mohawk Valley superintendent observed,

*In the tax cap era, school districts need to be careful with the allocation of resources and prepare for the next mandate from GASB [i.e., Governmental Accounting Standards Board] or the federal government, or a dip in the economy that could severely impact the provision of state aid. Superintendents and school boards do not like to raise property taxes. It is prudent to house funds in legally constituted reserve accounts with funds that are already available without raising taxes.*

Concern about current reliance on reserves remains high among superintendents leading city districts (72 percent) and high poverty districts (81 percent).

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**North Country Rural:** For the past few years we have been enjoying an improving economic climate bringing about decreasing pension costs, modest increases in health insurance, and substantial increases in state aid. However, policymakers, the media, and the public should understand that this situation is temporary. Just as our emergence from the Great Recession helped rebuild state coffers and yielded an upturn in the markets so will any cyclical downturn have an opposite impact on major budgetary revenue and expense areas. Without the ability to offset any downturn -- the tax cap prevents our ability to do so -- we should expect dramatic reductions in our ability to finance programs and once again face the prospect of having to make difficult and damaging cuts. If the tax cap is to remain -- and regretfully, I think it is -- we will need to reduce its rigidity so that local school boards have better options for offsetting future declines in state aid and eventual increases in pensions, health care, BOCES etc.

**Capital Region Rural:** With rising fixed costs, tax cap, and increasing regulatory requirements, we are very concerned about our ability to grow and adapt to prepare our students for a vibrant and complex 21st century future.

**Finger Lakes City:** Unfunded mandates with inadequate state aid = problems in the future.

**Central New York Rural:** Without an increase in state aid, we will all be in a lot of trouble. Especially rural districts.

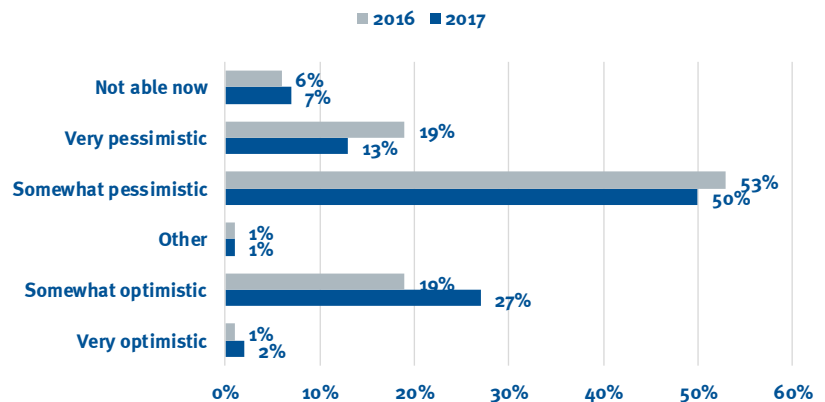
**Finger Lakes Rural:** Most of our families are eligible for public assistance. The best way to lift our students out of generational poverty is to equitably fund school systems like ours so that we can prepare our students to compete with the best and brightest from more affluent communities. I'm also very concerned about the potential impact of federal education funds to NYS. Fewer federal dollars will mean decreased state aid. State aid accounts for 67% of our annual revenue to cover 67% of our operating expenses.

**North Country Rural:** We are heavily reliant on state aid so fluctuations can have a significant impact on programs. Our poverty rate is rising while enrollment is dropping. Students tend to have more significant emotional and academic challenges.

## Outlook for the Future

Asked to think ahead three years or so, 29 percent of superintendents responded that they are now somewhat or very optimistic that their district will be able to fund services adequate to the needs of their students. That is an increase of nine points from a year ago. But 70 percent of superintendents remain pessimistic, including 7 percent who say their districts cannot fund adequate services now.

Thinking ahead 3 years or so, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about whether your district will be able to fund programs and services adequate to the needs of your students?



The last figure suggests that there are nearly 50 districts in the state whose superintendents believe they are now “educationally insolvent.” Based on our survey responses, two-thirds of these districts serve rural communities. Eighty percent educate fewer than 2,500 students and one-third serve fewer than 1,000. In two-thirds of these districts, over 40 percent of students are estimated to qualify for free or reduced price lunches. *All* of their superintendents cite the possibility of inadequate state aid as a *concern* in thinking about the financial outlook for their district and 86 percent name it as their *greatest concern*; the remainder cite increasing student needs. Over 70 percent are concerned about reliance on reserves.

As with our other overall fiscal condition questions, city and high poverty school district superintendents tend to be most pessimistic.

Both last year and this year, the Council’s surveys found divergence between immediate and longer-term outlook among superintendents. Particularly a year ago, those leading

higher poverty, more state aid-dependent districts were typically more positive about their financial position for that year, but more pessimistic looking ahead. For superintendents serving more affluent, property tax-dependent districts, the reverse has been true.

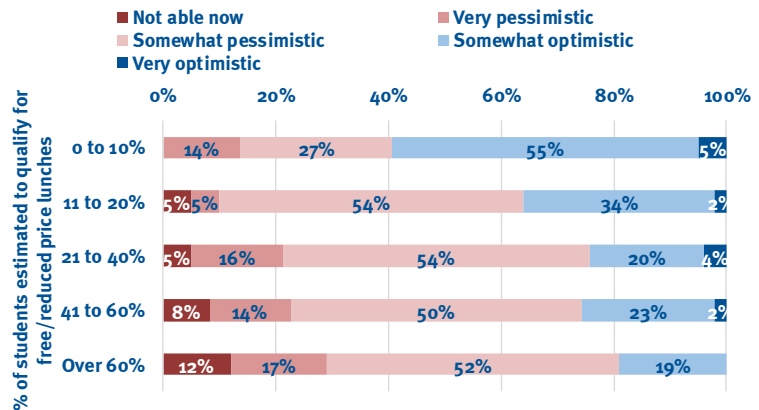
The diverging outlooks a year ago probably reflected what was happening with primary revenue sources – higher poverty districts were less affected by that year’s near zero tax cap, while even large percentage increases in state aid for the more affluent districts were not enough to offset the impact of the very low tax cap on their main revenue source.

In this year’s survey, patterns in current year perspective are less sharply defined, but longer-term pessimism remains prevalent among superintendents leading higher poverty school districts.

### Factors Causing Financial Concern

We also asked superintendents what factors cause them concern in thinking about the financial prospects for their schools, then which one factor causes them the greatest concern. As the greatest concern, the possibility of inadequate state aid stands out this year, chosen by 50 percent of superintendents. The share picking the tax cap as the greatest concern dropped from 28 percent a year ago to 16 percent, presumably reflecting the increase in the allowable levy growth factor to 1.26 percent this year, up from the near zero cap the year before. There was a five point increase in the percentage of superintendents citing increasing student needs as their greatest concern (from 10 percent to 15 percent).

Thinking ahead 3 years or so, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about whether your district will be able to fund programs and services adequate to the needs of your students?



Which issues cause concern in thinking about the financial outlook for your district?	2016		2017	
	A concern	Greatest concern	A concern	Greatest concern
Inadequate state aid	91%	44%	90%	50%
The tax cap	89%	28%	81%	16%
Increasing needs of students (e.g., increasing student poverty or increasing numbers of English Language Learners, recently arrived immigrant children, or students with disabilities)	78%	10%	83%	15%
Expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs (e.g., pensions, health insurance)	76%	9%	84%	11%
Declining student enrollment	47%	5%	48%	5%
Other (Please specify)	10%	2%	10%	2%
Additional costs arising from state or federal mandates	NA	NA	70%	1%
Increasing student enrollment	5%	0%	7%	0%
Costs due to students enrolling in charter schools	NA	NA	10%	0%
Poor or uncertain community support for the schools	10%	0%	7%	0%

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**Lower Hudson Valley Suburb:** The lack of certainty for annual budget development ... is like playing "Wheel of Fortune". We don't know what the tax cap and/or state aid will be entering the budgeting process and whether we will 'lose a turn' or hit a high dollar number on the wheel.

**Southern Tier Suburb:** With the property tax cap, all roads now lead to state aid. Thus, the entire budgeting process has become a bit of a roller coaster ride with the ability of the state to support the public schools as the key element.

**Western New York Rural:** We have lost the ability to do any meaningful long term financial (or programmatic) planning. The tax cap strangles us, we are very dependent upon state aid, and we have to keep within 4% in reserves (while municipal gov't. level is 10%). These are challenging parameters as mandates, health insurance costs, and TRS payments increase or change annually, but we find a way to do it and then subject our efforts to a public vote.

**Long Island Suburb:** For 2017-2018, the increase in healthcare premiums for employees was almost the same as the allowable tax levy increase under the cap. This means that all other increases need to be paid for through our increase in state aid.

**Mohawk Valley Rural:** In the tax cap era, school districts need to be careful with the allocation of resources and prepare for the next mandate from GASB [Governmental Accounting Standards Board] or the federal government or a dip in the economy that could severely impact the provision of state aid. Superintendents and school boards do not like to raise property taxes. It is prudent to house funds in legally constituted reserve accounts with funds that are already available without raising taxes.

Asked to pick *any factor* causing financial worries, five items scored notably higher from the rest: inadequate state aid (90 percent); expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs such as pensions and health insurance (84 percent), increasing needs of students (83 percent), the tax cap (81 percent), and additional costs arising from state and federal mandates (70 percent).

The high share of superintendents picking increases in fixed or hard to control costs as a leading concern might be a surprise, given that the mandated employer contribution rate for teacher pensions has now declined for three straight years. But superintendents repeatedly cite health insurance cost pressures as threats to their school systems' financial sustainability. A Mid-Hudson Valley superintendent explained,

*Health care costs grew 25 percent this year with expected double digit cost increases in the future. Retirement costs have stabilized, but that is unpredictable going forward. Employee benefits and the requirement to maintain benefit levels is the greatest financial pressure going forward.*

In nine of the 10 state regions used in this survey, the prospect of inadequate state aid ranked as the greatest concern; in the Lower Hudson Valley the tax cap tied with state aid at 32 percent in being most widely cited as the greatest financial concern. Fewer than 10 percent of superintendents serving rural, Southern Tier, Central New York and Western New York school districts picked the tax cap as their greatest concern.

In two regions, Western New York and the Southern Tier, over 20 percent of superintendents identified increasing needs of students as their greatest financial concern.

Declining student enrollment was named as a concern by 67 percent of rural superintendents and by over half of superintendents in six of the eight upstate regions.



## 2017-18 PROGRAM IMPACT

Each year, THE COUNCIL’s surveys have asked superintendents how they perceive their school district budget’s impact on specific operations and services. In recent years, we have limited the survey to inquiring exclusively about direct student services.

As with our findings regarding overall financial condition, the tendency is for greater numbers of superintendents to report no change as the impact of their 2017-18 district budget on specific student services, with declining numbers reporting either a positive or negative impact. Importantly, in no year has a majority of superintendents statewide reported a positive budget impact for *any* service.

Forty-two percent of superintendents said that their district budget would have a positive impact on core instruction in elementary grades, the highest percentage for any program or service.

The area, “Student counseling, social work, mental health or similar services” saw the largest increase in superintendents anticipating a positive budget impact, rising from 29 percent a year ago to 34 percent in this year’s results. Since 2014, the share of superintendents foreseeing positive impact on this service area has tripled, again a steeper rate of improvement than for any other area.

### What was the impact of this year's district budget decisions on each of the following areas of student services?

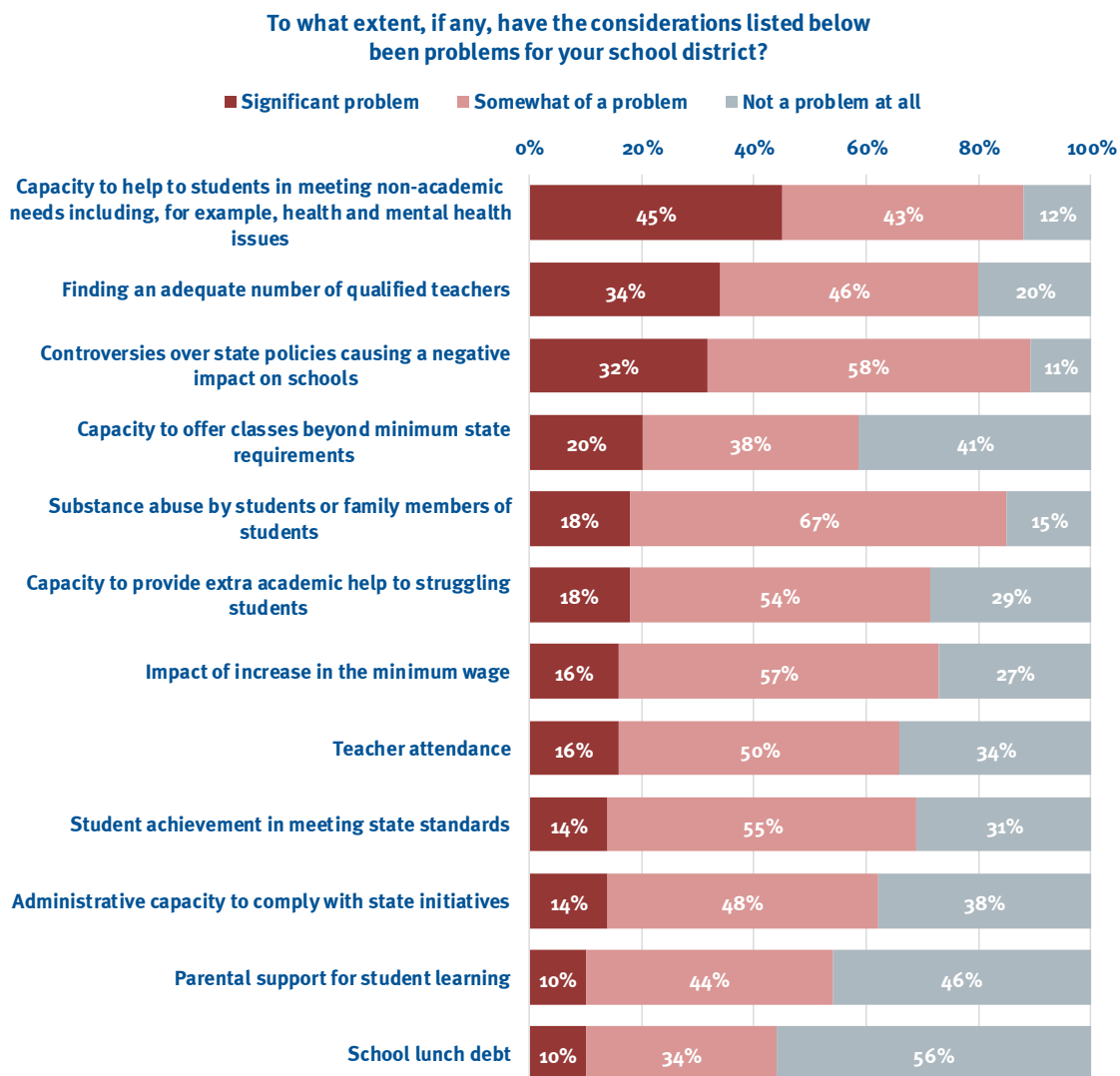
Program Area	Impact	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Instruction in English, Math, Science and Social Studies -- All Grades	<b>Positive</b>	3%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	<b>No Change</b>	41%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	<b>Negative</b>	56%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Core instruction in elementary grades	<b>Positive</b>	NA	13%	19%	27%	36%	47%	42%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	46%	50%	47%	52%	46%	54%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	41%	31%	26%	13%	8%	4%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in the middle level grades	<b>Positive</b>	NA	11%	16%	21%	29%	34%	31%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	56%	56%	55%	60%	62%	65%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	33%	29%	24%	11%	4%	4%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in high school	<b>Positive</b>	NA	10%	13%	18%	31%	36%	31%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	53%	60%	56%	57%	58%	63%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	37%	27%	26%	12%	6%	5%
Extra academic help for students who need it -- any level	<b>Positive</b>	2%	9%	16%	21%	34%	40%	37%
	<b>No Change</b>	39%	42%	40%	38%	40%	44%	47%
	<b>Negative</b>	59%	48%	45%	42%	26%	15%	16%
Advanced or enrichment classes	<b>Positive</b>	3%	8%	9%	14%	21%	28%	29%
	<b>No Change</b>	56%	57%	56%	56%	58%	62%	59%
	<b>Negative</b>	41%	35%	35%	31%	21%	11%	12%
Career and technical education	<b>Positive</b>	NA	NA	NA	9%	21%	26%	26%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	NA	0%	70%	68%	67%	68%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	NA	NA	21%	10%	6%	5%
Second language instruction at the middle or high school levels	<b>Positive</b>	NA	NA	8%	7%	11%	12%	13%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	NA	69%	72%	74%	80%	76%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	NA	25%	21%	15%	8%	11%
Student counseling, social work, mental health or similar support services	<b>Positive</b>	NA	NA	6%	11%	23%	29%	34%
	<b>No Change</b>	NA	NA	65%	61%	58%	60%	52%
	<b>Negative</b>	NA	NA	30%	28%	18%	11%	13%

## “PROBLEMS”

This year, the Council asked superintendents to indicate to what extent each item in a collection of circumstances are problems for their districts. The list was not intended as an exhaustive compilation of every problem which might befall a school system. Rather, one continuing use of this question will be to explore correlations between financial conditions and other problems.

Most widely cited as a significant problem was “Capacity to help to students in meeting non-academic needs including, for example, health and mental health issues,” cited by 45 percent of superintendents. Next was, “Finding an adequate number of qualified teachers,” identified by 34 percent of superintendents. Thirty-two percent of superintendents reported that “Controversies over state policies causing a negative impact on schools” is a significant problem.

No other problem was characterized as “significant” by more than 20 percent of superintendents. But only 15 percent of superintendents reported that, “Substance abuse (including opioid abuse) by students or family members of students” is “not a problem at all” in their districts. Only two other areas were less frequently cited as problems.



Not surprisingly, superintendents citing capacity to help students with non-academic needs tended to be concentrated in higher poverty districts in cities or rural communities. In some cases, pupil needs may be less than in other districts, but access to services may also be less.

Teacher shortages are reported as most acute in poor, rural regions. For example, 72 percent of North Country superintendents said that finding an adequate number of qualified teachers is a significant problem, as did 62 percent of superintendents leading high poverty school districts. In open-ended comments, it was not unusual for North Country and Southern Tier superintendents to report difficulty in recruiting for *all* teaching positions.

Invited to identify specific teaching fields for which finding acceptable candidates has been difficult, 66 percent of the responding superintendents cited the sciences, with about one-third of those specifically mentioning earth science, chemistry and physics. Another 54 percent identified special education as a shortage area, with many pointing to high school special education in particular. Half the responding superintendents named either middle level technology or family and consumer sciences or both as subject areas they had struggled to fill with qualified teachers. Thirty percent identified foreign language teaching positions as hard to fill. Shortages in some areas are more regionalized. For example, downstate superintendents were more likely to report difficulty in finding English as a new language or bilingual education teachers.

The survey suggests that already struggling schools are at-risk of falling further behind: 76 percent of the superintendents who said their schools are currently unable to fund adequate services indicate that finding an adequate number of qualified teachers is a significant problem. Difficulty in filling teaching positions also correlated with problems with low community expectations for schools, administrative capacity to implement state initiatives, and limited ability to obtain quality professional development; in each case more than 60 percent of superintendents naming those circumstances as significant problems said finding qualified teachers is also a significant problem.

“Controversies over state policies causing a negative impact on schools” drew the third highest percentage of superintendents citing it as a significant problem, with 32 percent of superintendents statewide doing so. But that figure is down by exactly half from 2015, the last time the Council inquired about the impact of policy controversies. Many of the factors influencing this result are probably not financial and thus not addressed in depth by this survey. But citing harmful controversies as a significant problem tended to correlate with general pessimism about finances, concerns about district capacity (both administrative and non-academic student support), and low community expectations.

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

**North Country Rural:** Not only the traditionally hard to find teacher (e.g. HS Math and Science, Technology, etc.), but also the general, run of the mill teachers like elementary and physical education are becoming hard to find.

**Southern Tier Rural:** The number of applicants is down in all areas. Math and science teachers are incredibly difficult to find. Certain types of special education certifications are very difficult to find.

**Western New York Rural:** We have found it difficult to find Special Education, Science, LOTE [i.e., languages other than English], and have had a minimal response to all of our teacher postings.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER SALARY INCREASES

Teacher salaries are typically the largest single expenditure virtually every school district’s budget. This year, the Council’s finance survey asked, for the first time, “Which of the following factors have the greatest influence toward increasing teacher salaries in your district?” Nine options were offered, including an “other” choice, and superintendents were asked to rank the top three influences. “Salaries for other districts in the region” ranked as the greatest influence by a wide margin, chosen by 81 percent of respondents as one of three leading influences. Next, in order, came the effect of the Triborough Law, need to attract qualified candidates, and real or perceived improvement in the district’s financial condition.

**Which of the following factors have the greatest influence toward increasing teacher salaries in your district? Please rank the top three influences.**

	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Weighted Rank (Score)	% as 1 of 3 leading influences
Salaries for other districts in the region	123	96	40	1 (601)	81%
The Triborough law which provides that "step" increases or salary increments continue under an expired collective bargaining agreement	83	39	43	2 (370)	52%
Need to attract an adequate number of acceptable candidates for teaching positions	56	55	40	3 (318)	47%
Real or perceived improvement in the district's financial outlook	18	71	61	4 (257)	47%
Cost of living considerations	18	25	57	5 (161)	31%
Changing membership on the school district's board of education	8	13	21	6 (71)	13%
Salaries for other occupations within the region	5	13	27	7 (68)	14%
Other (please explain below)	6	3	11	8 (35)	6%
Increases in the minimum wage	2	4	19	9 (33)	8%

The Triborough Law provides that, in the event a collective bargaining agreement expires, all its provisions remain in effect, including a guarantee of salary increments or “step” increases for each year of additional services. School district leaders commonly assert that Triborough puts them at a disadvantage in negotiations, since most bargaining unit members still receive some pay increase even under an expired contract.

A basic position of the Council is that, if the state is not going change rules which drive costs, it must fund those rules, with strong state aid increases.

## PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE FUNDING

For the first time in the Council’s seven annual school finance surveys, a new option leads in what superintendents statewide identify as their top priority should additional funding become available. Increasing mental health, social work, counseling or similar services supplanted extra academic help for struggling students as the most widely selected priority.

The survey asked, “What would be your top three priorities for funding if your district were to receive an increase in revenue beyond what would be needed to comply with mandates and maintain current services, or realize a reduction in costs with similar impact (for example, a reduction in pension costs)?”

The surge in the percentage of superintendents selecting student mental health-related services as a priority is dramatic. This year, 52 percent of superintendents chose mental health and related services as one of their leading finding priorities, up from 35 percent in 2016 and from 22 percent in 2013.

If your district were to receive an increase in funding beyond what would be needed to fund state mandates and your current level of services, what would be your top three priorities for the use of that funding?							
Priority Option (All options listed appeared in the top 10 in at least 1 of the 7 survey years)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Rank / Percentage of respondents citing as a top 3 priority						
Increase mental health, counseling, social work, or similar services for students	N.L.	N.L.	8/22%	2/30%	2/31%	2/35%	1/52%
Increase extra academic help for struggling students	1/64%	1/66%	1/53%	1/47%	1/51%	1/48%	2/35%
Increase enrichment/advanced classes	6/23%	3/37%	4/27%	3/27%	3/25%	3/28%	3/28%
Expand or initiate prekindergarten	N.L.	N.L.	N.L.	9/11%	9/13%	6/16%	4/18%
Reduce property tax levy	2/57%	2/38%	2/30%	6/19%	5/19%	4/23%	5/18%
Increase funding of reserves	4/29%	5/27%	7/22%	7/18%	7/16%	5/18%	6/15%
Improve facilities	N.L.	N.L.	9/12%	12/9%	12/11%	7/16%	7/13%
Increase career and technical education opportunities	N.L.	N.L.	13/8%	8/15%	7/16%	9/14%	8/15%
Expand professional development	5/28%	6/28%	3/30%	4/29%	4/25%	8/17%	9/17%
Extend the school day	N.L.	N.L.	N.L.	15/6%	10/10%	12/10%	10/9%
Reduce class sizes	3/30%	4/26%	5/20%	5/18%	8/15%	11/10%	11/10%
Strengthen administration	11/9%	8/17%	12/9%	11/9%	11/13%	15/11%	12/8%
Increase other student support services	7/24%	7/21%	11/9%	14/6%	16/9%	10/12%	15/7%
Purchase technology	8/12%	9/16%	6/26%	10/12%	15/8%	14/7%	18/6%
Improve maintenance	10/10%	10/8%	16/4%	18/5%	20/2%	20/7%	23/4%
Purchase instruction-related materials	9/10%	11/7%	10/12%	20/5%	19/3%	19/4%	24/2%

N.L. -- not listed as an option in that year

Rank is based on weighted score result (3 for 1st, 2 for 2nd, 1 for 3rd)

The priority given by superintendents to increasing mental health services is consistent with other findings in the survey. “Capacity to help students in meeting non-academic needs including, for example, health and mental health issues” was cited by 45 percent of superintendents as a significant problem, more than any other issue listed. Also, the share of superintendents citing increasing student needs as their greatest concern in thinking about their district’s financial prospects increased from 10 percent to 15 percent from last year to this, more than for any other consideration. Finally, the percentage of superintendents reporting that annual district budgets have had a positive impact on mental health, counseling and social work increased more than for any other service area, both over the past year and past three years, more than tripling from 11 percent in 2014 to 34 percent this year and increasing by five points over 2016 while other areas remained roughly flat or declined.

Expanding mental health-related services was the leading priority among superintendents in each of the three community types (city, suburb, or rural), followed in each case by increasing extra academic help for struggling students.

Reducing the property tax levy has declined as a priority since the enactment of the tax cap and especially since the base for the cap dropped below 2 percent and remained there for four consecutive years. Reducing class sizes has fallen as a priority over time as higher numbers of districts reported improvements in their overall financial condition.

Some past priorities appear linked to state initiatives. For example, “strengthen administration” peaked in the year the state mandated new teacher and principal evaluations systems were adopted and implemented, while “purchase instructional materials” was more widely chosen as a priority in the years when the Common Core standards were first implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. “Behavioral Health Barometer: New York, Volume 4: Indicators as measured through the 2015.” National Survey on Drug Use and Health, the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services, and the Uniform Reporting System. Rockville, MD, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Twenge, Jean M. “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” The Atlantic, September 2017

<sup>3</sup> “Academic Achievement Isn't the Only Mission: The 49th Annual Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.” PDK, PDK International, September 2017, [pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational\\_poll\\_2017.pdf](http://pdkpoll.org/assets/downloads/PDKnational_poll_2017.pdf). and “2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the public Schools: New York State Addition.” September 2017.

<sup>4</sup> In this report, “high poverty districts” refers to school districts whose superintendents estimated more than 60 percent of students qualify for the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program. “Low poverty” refers to districts with 10 percent or fewer students eligible.