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## **Superintendents' survey finds wide concern about student well-being, extensive district efforts to improve school security**

**ALBANY** – The New York State Council of School Superintendents today released results from its eighth annual [survey of school district leaders on school finance concerns](#).

Council Executive Director Charles Dedrick said, “Our survey findings echo those of a year ago – superintendents are increasingly concerned about the well-being of their students and the capacity of schools to give them all the help they need, especially in the area of mental health.”

Dedrick added, “More and more school districts are taking exceptional steps that weren’t widespread a decade ago, both to help their students and families with non-school problems, and to make sure nothing is overlooked that could make their schools as safe and secure as possible.”

For the second straight year, improving mental health services was the most widely cited priority for new funding among superintendents, should their districts receive revenue beyond what they would need to preserve existing services and satisfy state mandates. Fifty-six percent of superintendents identified improving mental health services as one of their top three local funding priorities, up from 35 percent just two years ago.

Asked about a series of cost-related issues, superintendents most commonly cited as “significant problems” for their districts “special education cost increases” (56 percent) and “capacity to help students with non-academic needs, including health and mental health issues” (47 percent).

Council Deputy Director Robert Lowry said, “On questions concerning basic financial condition, our results are similar to last year and the year before, with most superintendents reporting no change in their districts’ financial condition from a year ago.” Lowry added, “But we are concerned that the share of superintendents seeing improvement peaked in 2016 at 31 percent. We think it’s likely there are districts which had to make terrible program reductions during the Great Recession and its aftermath and haven’t seen much improvement in the years since.”

This year’s survey also included new questions which reveal districts making extensive efforts to improve school security following school shooting tragedies a year ago. Eighty-nine percent of superintendents reported at least one action to improve school security in the six months following last year’s Parkland, Florida school shootings and 64 percent reported three or more actions. Training of school staff in security, expansion of counseling and mental health services, and policy changes such as building entry and lock-down procedures were the most commonly cited actions.

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In addition, over 70 percent of superintendents reported their districts were considering further steps, with implementing restorative justice practices in student discipline most common among possible next steps, named by 35 percent of superintendents.

Also, 59 percent of superintendents said they believe their district budgets will improve school security. This is the first time in the survey's eight years that a majority of superintendents anticipated a positive budget impact in any student service area. Forty-nine percent of superintendents expected a positive impact on mental health services from their 2018-19 school budgets.

### Highlights:

- 17% of superintendents reported that their district's financial condition had improved over a year ago, down from 24% in 2017; 18% said their district's financial condition had worsened, up from 13% in 2017. 65% reported no change.
- Asked to look ahead three years or so, only 24% of superintendents expressed optimism about their district's financial prospects, down from 29% in 2017. 7% said their districts cannot provide adequate services now, the same percentage as in 2017; districts in this group are predominantly higher in student poverty and especially concerned about future state aid.
- As in 2017, improving mental health services was again the most widely cited priority for new funding, cited by 56% of superintendents as one of their top three priorities should their schools receive revenue beyond what would be needed to maintain current services and satisfy mandates.
- Asked about aspects of child well-being, 67% of superintendents expressed a high level of concern about students' mental/emotional health; 39% did so about family economic circumstances and 33% about readiness for kindergarten.
- The possibility of inadequate state aid was named by 47% of superintendents as their greatest concern in thinking about financial prospects for their schools, followed by hard to control costs such as pensions and health insurance (14%) and the tax cap (10%).
- 32% of superintendents statewide listed impact of the new \$10,000 cap on federal deductions for state and local taxes (SALT) as one of the issues causing concern in thinking about their districts' financial outlook. 72% of Lower Hudson Valley superintendents identified the SALT cap as a concern, as did 57% of Long Island superintendents.
- 56% of superintendents named rising special education expenses as a significant problem, more than any other cost-related item. Next most widely cited were capacity to help students in meeting non-academic needs (47%) and finding an adequate number of qualified teachers (38%).
- 59% of superintendents said that their district budget for 2018-19 will improve school security – the first time ever a majority of superintendents in our surveys anticipated improvement in any service.
- 89% of superintendents reported their district had taken some action in the six months following the Parkland tragedy to improve school security; 64% reported three or more actions.
- 97% reported having taken some action to improve security prior to the Parkland tragedy. Over 70% reported their districts were actively considering further security improvements.
- 73% of superintendents reported that their district has an arrangement for professional security staff in their schools; 56% report at least part-time coverage in all schools.

The survey was conducted between August 7 and August 25, 2018. A total of 328 superintendents submitted complete responses, a response rate of 50.5%

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*The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York State. The Council provides more than 800 members with professional development opportunities, publications and personal support while advocating for public education and the superintendency.*