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CONTACT: Robert Lowry • 518-449-1063 or 518-435-5996 (cell)
E-mail: boblowry@nyscoss.org

Statement of Charles Dedrick, NYS Council of School Superintendents Executive Director on the New State Budget

ALBANY – Despite significant uncertainties over state finances, the legislature and governor have made education a priority in the new state budget.

We and others hoped for more help to schools through a larger increase in Foundation Aid. For several years, the Council has advocated that the state must either change its rules or fund its rules – either do more to help schools to manage and control costs and adopt some changes to the tax cap, or provide very strong increases in state aid.

We are encouraged that both new chairs of the legislature’s education committees – Senator Shelley Mayer and Assemblyman Michael Benedetto – have said they want to revisit and update the Foundation Aid formula.

The budget does address several priorities of our organization:

- It authorizes school districts to establish a reserve for their teacher pension obligations. This reserve will help schools preserve programs and positions the next time mandated contribution rates climb and state aid grows tight. Local governments can already set-aside funds for pension costs for their entire workforce.
- It clarifies the authority of State University institutions to permit high school students to take college dual enrollment classes tuition free.
- It permits school districts which contract-out pupil transportation to reduce costs by sharing routes.
- It makes the first adjustment in the salary cap for Board of Cooperative Educational Services district superintendents since 2003, helping these crucial regional assets to retain and recruit strong leaders.

We are grateful to Speaker Heastie, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, their colleagues, and to Governor Cuomo for delivering these actions to help our schools and our students.

It is also positive that consolidation of expense-based aids into a single formula has been rejected. The proposed new formula was unlikely to keep pace with district needs.

We appreciate, also, that the final budget amends the Governor’s proposal to inject state control over school-level spending decisions. As enacted, the initiative should be more limited in its effects and more practical to administer.

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We expected that the property tax cap would be made permanent this year. We are disappointed that common sense adjustments we and others advocated have not been addressed, including help for BOCES with capital costs.

We look forward to working with all parties in the second half of the session to help enact changes to provide flexibility in the school calendar, protect student safety, and improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students, everywhere.

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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.