

## Reimburse Special Transportation Expenses

School districts have incurred exceptional transportation costs last year and this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive Budget would provide only partial reimbursement toward those costs.

When school buildings were abruptly closed last March, districts swiftly launched remote instruction to maintain teaching and learning. They also implemented new models to distribute meals for students. In many cases, districts used their student transportation systems to deliver instructional materials and meals. Some used them to create mobile hotspots for families without internet access. These actions were necessitated by an Executive Order of the Governor.

Some districts also incurred “standby” costs in paying employees and contractors so that the capacity to bring students to school and get them home again would still be there if resuming in-person instruction became possible. The federal CARES Act also directed aid recipients to maintain payrolls, to the extent practicable. Many school leaders, on advice of counsel, took this provision very seriously and maintained these employees on payroll to avoid federal law violations.

Districts have been incurring similar transportation costs this year during times that it has been necessary to close school buildings.

These expenses have been deemed not aidable under current law. The Executive Budget does promise at least some reimbursement for the exceptional service delivery expenses, but only for costs incurred last year (2019-20) and nothing for the “standby” costs of assuring that transportation personnel would still be on staff whenever in-person teaching and learning could resume.

We recognize the policy implications of reimbursing schools for “standby” costs, but the employment market and unemployment provisions necessitated it. Many drivers would have earned more through the unemployment system than as bus drivers because of the \$600/week enhanced unemployment benefit. If districts laid off these drivers or stopped paying contractors, they would likely never have been able to rehire them. In addition, districts that continued to pay bus drivers saved the state money by reducing overall state unemployment costs.

***The Council supports legislation proposed by the State Education Department that would assure Transportation Aid reimbursements for both delivery and standby costs, for both 2019-20 and 2020-21.***