

POLICY REPORT

Superintendents Survey: Schools Taking on Greater Mission; Aid Increases Are Benefiting Students

NOVEMBER 2022



Following increases in Foundation Aid from state government and infusions of COVID-relief aid from Washington, superintendents across New York State report increased optimism about the financial outlook for their schools. Also, solid majorities of superintendents anticipate that an unprecedented number of student services will be improved by the budgets their districts adopted for the 2022-23 school year.

But the district leaders also emphasize that their systems have taken on vastly greater responsibilities in helping students and families with non-instructional concerns, most notably in the area of mental health. Challenges in finding teachers and other staff are seen as impeding the ability of schools to meet those needs and the potential for a “fiscal cliff” provokes concerns about the sustainability of the improvements schools have made.

These are among the key findings from a survey of conducted by the New York State Council of School Superintendents. The survey was the Council’s eleventh in 12 years focusing on finance and policy issues.¹ Four hundred sixty-seven superintendents participated, a response rate of 64.6%.

KEY POINTS

- Majorities of superintendents foresee their current district budgets having a positive impact on 11 areas of student services, including core instruction at each school level, student mental health services, extra academic help, and school security.
 - Only *twice in nine* prior annual surveys between 2011 and 2019 did a majority of superintendents anticipate improvement in *any* area.
 - Superintendents leading districts higher in student poverty and receiving larger Foundation Aid and federal COVID funding amounts are *more likely to forecast positive impacts* on many student services.
- A dominant theme in open-ended comments from superintendents is that their schools have taken on a greater role in providing supports for children and families in the community (i.e., health, mental health, food, recreation, other supports).
 - Related, asked about experiences since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 57% agreed that it is “completely true” that their schools have assumed an expanded service mission; in total, 90% responded that is either completely or mostly true.
 - 81% of superintendents responded that it is completely or mostly true that their schools are now the first and most readily available source of mental health services for young people in their communities.
- Looking ahead three years or so, 55% of superintendents responded that they are somewhat or very optimistic that their schools will continue to be able to provide services adequate to the needs of students—up from just 25% in 2019.
 - But superintendents leading districts higher in student poverty and more reliant on recent Foundation Aid increases and federal assistance tend to be *less optimistic* about the financial outlook for their schools.
- 54% of superintendents identified the end of federal COVID-relief funding as one factor causing concern in their thinking about the financial outlook for their schools.

Impact of 2022-23 District Budgets on Opportunities and Assistance for Students

In the Council’s first nine comprehensive surveys on financial matters, *only twice* did a majority of superintendents respond that they expect that their district budgets would have a positive impact on *any area* of student services—school security in 2018 (59%), the year after the Parkland, Florida school shootings, and student mental health services in 2019 (53%).

In the survey’s first year—2011—expectations for negative budget impacts were common. For example, 56% of superintendents statewide anticipated their district budgets would have a negative impact on instruction in English, mathematics, science, and social studies. That year, total School Aid was cut by 3.7%, compounding a 5.1% cut enacted the year before, and a freeze on most aid the year before that.

In more recent years, majorities of superintendents simply anticipated no change in most of those services due to their district budgets. A theme in our last survey before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was that increases in school funding were failing to keep pace with mounting student needs.

But all that has changed dramatically since the state committed to fully funding Foundation Aid and the federal government delivered COVID-related assistance targeted to schools.

In this year’s survey, majorities of superintendents statewide foresee improvements in 11 areas of student services. This includes over 70% expecting a positive budget impact on the areas of student mental health services (82%), extra academic help (79%), core instruction in elementary grades (74%), summer enrichment programs (72%), and school safety/security (71%).

Percent of superintendents anticipating positive impact on various student services due to their district budgets—2017 to 2022*					
	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022
Student mental health, counseling, social work, or similar support services	34%	49%	53%	80%	82%
Extra academic help for students who need it — any level	37%	31%	37%	78%	79%
Core instruction in elementary grades	42%	42%	44%	70%	74%
Summer enrichment programs	NA	NA	NA	NA	72%
School safety/security	30%	59%	49%	39%	71%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in the middle level grades	31%	31%	34%	55%	66%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in high school	31%	28%	34%	53%	63%
Prekindergarten	16%	18%	14%	39%	58%
Career and technical education	26%	23%	29%	34%	54%
Advanced classes (e.g., AP, IB, college-dual enrollment classes)	29%	30%	30%	33%	52%
Other extracurricular activities	21%	20%	23%	43%	51%
Other family support services (e.g., child care, health care, after-school activities, etc.)	NA	19%	19%	41%	49%
Instruction in music — any level	18%	20%	20%	35%	45%
Instruction in the arts — any level	16%	15%	18%	32%	43%
Services for English language learners	22%	24%	17%	36%	41%
Interscholastic athletics	18%	17%	20%	24%	40%
Student transportation	11%	11%	18%	25%	38%
Second language instruction at the middle or high school levels	13%	13%	23%	24%	33%

*The Council did not conduct a survey in 2020.

Foundation Aid, COVID-Relief Aid, and Program Impact

Since the state budget enacted in 2019, total School Aid statewide has increased by 12.8%, fueled by the state’s steps toward fully funding its Foundation Aid formula. Foundation Aid was increased by \$1.40 billion (7.6%) in 2021-22 and by \$1.53 billion (7.7%) in 2022-23. These increases followed a freeze on the formula in the 2020-21 state budget, enacted just weeks after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The phase-in is due to be completed in the next state budget.

A Key Theme—Schools Are Doing More Than Ever Before to Help Children and Their Families

Capital Region Rural: Schools are the community superglue. Our communities identify with their schools rather than their geographic location. Through COVID we learned the importance of schools beyond academics. Schools need to be supported to continue to serve the students and the entire community.

Upstate BOCES: Public schools have a long-standing role as the service hub of many communities, but with the collapse of so many social structures, public schools are playing a broader role in serving the children of NYS as well as the families and the broader community. Public schools serve as the resource for health, dental health, vision health, mental health, housing support services, food insecurities, AND academic outcomes.

Western New York Rural: It is most important to understand that ALL employees have multiple roles. A teacher is not a teacher first... They are parent, counselor, and nurse providing the basic needs of most students prior to conducting lessons. Same is true for aides, monitors, custodians, office staff, bus drivers and administrators. Daily planning, for each role, has become increasingly difficult and emotionally exhausting to meet the needs of everyone in our buildings. Some policymakers or news anchors may say this has always been said. I would respond, absolutely true! But it is so very different since March of 2020.

Long Island Suburban: Students need a good breakfast, lunch and dinner. They need academic, social & emotional after-school support during the week, up until 6pm due to parents work schedules. Schools need to become community hubs after the school day to provide the wrap around services families need to support their children—our students.

Western New York Suburban: It is important for everyone to understand that the scope of work associated with educating children has changed substantially in the past 15 years... Every symptom of what ails our country walks in the schoolhouse door each day in the form of our children and team members. Our work is only accomplished by helping people work through those challenges before we get to any curriculum.

Central New York Rural: The role of schools has been greatly expanded in the last five years. Mental health issues in both students and staff have increased dramatically since the pandemic began and most communities do not have adequate support structures in place. This will continue to be an issue of concern moving forward.

Capital Region Small City: We continue to be the one institution that has to deal with all of society's ills and challenges and, without schools as evident during the pandemic, the rest of society cannot function. We must protect our schools, fund them and ensure students are prepared for the 21st Century.

Mohawk Valley Rural: The landscape is significantly different than it was even five years ago. The school is seen as the place that needs to provide even basic needs for students while trying to teach to standards and motivate students to see the value in getting an education.

North Country Rural: Today's schools are not what they were when we were younger. Children are walking into school with more mental and physical health issues than ever before ... It's a constant challenge to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. Anxiety, depression, drug dependency - the list goes on, and we support the kids through it all... Our people show up every day and love these kids. Our teachers, cafeteria staff, drivers, cleaners, aides, assistants, and administrators are performing a Herculean task. I'm honored to work with such amazing people, but the hill we're climbing is growing ever larger.

Long Island Suburban: It is important that everyone understands that schools have had to evolve to serve students' needs that stretch well beyond providing a sound academic education. Sometimes this has occurred without significant new resources. The COVID-19 pandemic focused the light on our roles as health agencies, mental health agencies and overall social services agencies.

Southern Tier Small City: The difficult and important job educators on all levels have is misunderstood. Schools have become the place where families' needs are being met, from finding shelter, food to employment. They are as much of a community resource center as they are educational institutions while being held to the same standard and expectations regardless of the degree of diverse needs of students.

Capital Region Rural: New York's public schools have been, and continue to be, the most prominent social institution in each community and stakeholders depend on the variety of supports and services provided by schools to children and families. As a result of school community engagement, the system fulfills a mission to level the playing field for all students, and does so in a way that reflects unique circumstances on a district-by-district basis. Despite the diversity and complexity of the New York education setting, districts attempt to respond with thought and effectiveness in an effort to ensure student success.

Finger Lakes Rural: Schools have become the largest social service agencies in this state. Our responsibilities for loving, raising, feeding, and educating students over the past several years have increased exponentially. The future is our responsibility. This must be considered when examining new funding methodologies for schools.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

North Country Rural: Having the additional federal funding has allowed us to offer our student programs and services we could not have otherwise. This in turn has nurtured students, faculty and families and allowed us to build a full continuum of services for our students with special needs. Our students are making tremendous progress because they are receiving academic, behavioral, and social emotional support. This has reduced the impact of negative behaviors in the general education classroom and helped us improve our inclusionary practices.

Western New York Rural: We have been able to add supports and programs utilizing the federal money. Specifically, we have a robust after school program and enhanced summer programming that will diminish significantly when the federal money goes away. The additional Foundation Aid has been used to fund increasing special education costs.

Long Island Suburban: For the first time ever, we were able to provide transportation for summer school sessions (both elementary remediation and secondary credit recovery). This increased attendance dramatically.

North Country Small City: We are more than just academic centers. The mental health of our students is becoming very difficult to manage. We've hired two additional counselors and three social workers and are still struggling to meet their needs. I'm worried that additional funding will not be available to sustain our staffing levels going forward.

New York's school districts have also benefitted from an infusion of \$12 billion in targeted federal assistance under the 2020 Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act and the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (i.e., CRRSA/ARP funding).

Superintendents leading districts with greater Foundation Aid increases and greater federal CRRSA/ARP assistance per student were *more likely to foresee benefits for students* in key services from the budgets their districts were able to adopt last spring. For example:

- 92% of superintendents leading districts which received a Foundation Aid increase greater than \$1,500 per student expected improvement in student mental health services, compared to 60% of those serving districts receiving increases of less than \$200 per student.
- Likewise, superintendents of districts receiving CRRSA/ARP infusions of more than \$7,000 per student were most likely to anticipate positive impacts in nearly every service area, including 90% for both elementary school core instruction and student mental health services.

% of superintendents expecting positive impact from 2022-23 district budgets on selected student services Districts grouped by 2022-23 Foundation Aid increase per student							
	\$0 to \$200	\$201 to \$400	\$401 to \$600	\$601 to \$800	\$801 to \$1000	\$1001 to \$1500	Over \$1500
Core instruction in elementary grades	60%	72%	77%	76%	75%	89%	84%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in the middle level grades	53%	65%	66%	68%	69%	77%	76%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in high school	50%	61%	64%	65%	71%	67%	76%
Extra academic help for students who need it -- any level	60%	80%	79%	84%	86%	92%	92%
Student mental health, counseling, social work, or similar support services	68%	82%	75%	85%	86%	92%	88%

% of superintendents expecting positive impact from 2022-23 district budgets on selected student services Districts grouped by federal COVID-relief aid per student								
	\$0 to \$1000	\$1001 to \$2000	\$2001 to \$3000	\$3001 to \$4000	\$4001 to \$5000	\$5001 to \$6000	\$6001 to \$7000	Over \$7000
Core instruction in elementary grades	63%	80%	77%	72%	78%	68%	70%	90%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in the middle level grades	48%	77%	69%	61%	69%	61%	64%	76%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in high school	56%	67%	65%	61%	63%	53%	64%	76%
Extra academic help for students who need it -- any level	60%	81%	84%	80%	85%	86%	70%	85%
Student mental health, counseling, social work, or similar support services	70%	87%	87%	80%	82%	70%	73%	90%

A Key Theme—Foundation Aid and Federal COVID-19 Funding Are Enabling Schools to Improve Opportunities and Assistance for Students

Mid-Hudson Valley Suburban: We used the Foundation Aid increase to:

- add seats for BOCES Career and Technical Education
- maintain the budget to keep a social worker and psychologist at each school
- Add 4 Math Academic Intervention Services teachers
- Add a special education teacher and 2 special education teacher aides
- Add an occupational therapist, physical therapist, and 0.5 speech teacher
- Replace 776 aging Chromebooks
- and more...

Finger Lakes Rural: The school district has added both after-school in-person tutoring as well as on demand online tutoring for our students using the increase in federal and state funds, opening access for the needed extra support while allowing students to not miss any time during the instructional day.

Central New York Rural: We have used federal dollars to recruit and hire four "Family and Community Liaisons." These are professionals who have previously worked in county agencies that support area families. The liaisons aid families by connecting them with agencies that provide services needed for their children, the most prevalent being mental health support.

Mohawk Valley Rural: We are using the money to add a Licensed Social Worker, a student engagement coordinator and a family and community engagement specialist. We also are funding our after school enrichment program and summer enrichment programs with these funds.

Long Island Suburban: Our district has used and will continue to use federal and state aid to support additional mental health interventionists we have hired to provide support to students and families in crisis and to connect our students with outside resources, assistance with securing beds in mental health facilities, and provide workshops to our staff and families to raise mental health and wellness awareness.

North Country Rural: Our district utilized funds to increase contracted time of a school psychologist and a student assistance counselor; both of whom provide direct mental health and/or social-emotional support for students in grades PK-12. Additionally, we developed and are implementing an innovative Support Center for students in middle and high school. Funds are being used to staff a coordinator for this program which provides comprehensive academic, social, and emotional support for students.

Long Island Suburban: The additional state aid has allowed us to hire part-time social workers for every school building, supporting student mental wellness and performing crisis intervention in the pandemic's lingering aftermath. We received pre-K grant funds for the first time and the new program now helps better prepare students for kindergarten, integrates with the preschool special education process, and helps us identify the students who will be enrolling for the next year. We provide the service through CBOs and this has strengthened those resources in the community as well as our relationship with them.

Western New York Rural: We have used federal funds to provide after school academic support. We were also able to provide a targeted "summer skills camp" focused on core academic areas for select students in grades K-8. This made a measurable impact for these students when they moved to the next grade level in September.

Capital Region Rural: We have invested the federal dollars in adding a family liaison, as well as intervention specialists; revamping [our intervention model] and its associated training for staff; bringing professional speakers on mental health to our schools; and opening a recovery room for students.

Mohawk Valley Small City: We have added social emotional supports (Social Worker, Psychologist, Counseling), additional nursing, 2 behavioral specialists, additional classroom teachers to decrease class size, 2 AIS Teachers, before and after school care at each elementary school, and a music teacher.

Mohawk Valley Rural: We have been able to:

- add after school tutoring and programs
- add in a new guidance counselor and additional pupil services
- add new Chromebooks for students
- Add compensatory education teachers at 4 key areas - math and reading from K-12
- add teachers in math and science in key areas to lower class sizes
- increase field trips
- increase professional development for faculty and staff - including mental health days
- increase our summer enrichment program with additional student slots

North Country Rural: Our district utilized funds to increase contracted time of a school psychologist and a student assistance counselor; both of whom provide direct mental health and/or social-emotional support for students in grades PK-12. Additionally, we developed and are implementing an innovative Support Center for students in middle and high school. Funds are being used to staff a coordinator for this program which provides comprehensive academic, social, and emotional support for students.

Finger Lakes Rural: State lawmakers need to financially support schools, so that we don't face the economic "cliff" predicted by '24-25. With the minimum wage increase, we will be facing negotiations for increases that seem unreasonable and unpalatable for long-term financial planning. Instead of incentives for difficult to fill positions, units are requiring we open full negotiations, which hasn't been planned for in the current budget. We are putting more pressure and responsibilities on current employees, which only adds to the negativity and pressure they feel, thereby, affecting our social and emotional well-being efforts. We have been able to support programs through federal funds, but I am extremely concerned about the cliff in a couple years.

Federal COVID-relief funding was heavily targeted based on student poverty. Foundation Aid considers multiple factors, including giving significant weight to districts' ability to raise local revenue, as well as to student needs. Accordingly, superintendents leading high student poverty districts were especially likely to anticipate improved opportunities and assistance for their students from 2022-23 district budgets:

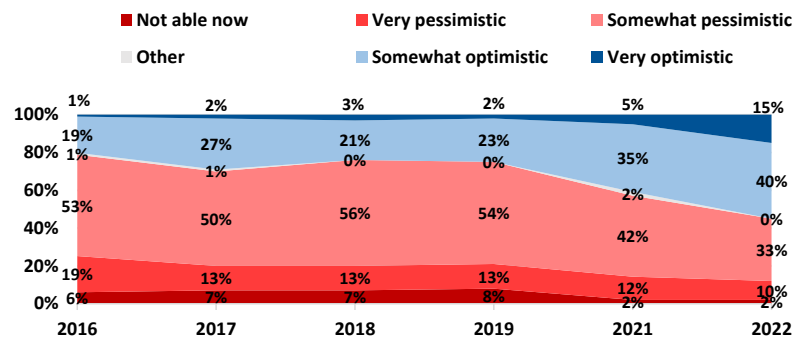
- 96% foresee a positive budget impact on core elementary school instruction; and
- 92% expect positive impacts on both extra academic help and student mental health services.

	% of superintendents expecting positive impact from 2022-23 district budgets on selected student services							
	Districts grouped by percentage of students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program							
	0 to 10%	11 to 20%	21 to 30%	31 to 40%	41 to 50%	51 to 60%	61 to 70%	Over 70%
Core instruction in elementary grades	59%	79%	78%	73%	73%	68%	86%	96%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in the middle level grades	48%	79%	76%	67%	58%	59%	77%	86%
Instruction in English, math, science, and social studies in high school	58%	66%	65%	61%	57%	60%	72%	81%
Extra academic help for students who need it -- any level	56%	81%	84%	77%	77%	81%	92%	92%
Student mental health, counseling, social work, or similar support services	78%	87%	81%	85%	81%	73%	84%	92%

Financial Outlook

The infusions of state and federal aid have also produced a dramatic shift among superintendents regarding the longer-term financial outlook for their schools. But, in contrast to the perceptions of positive programmatic impacts, superintendents leading districts with higher student poverty and greater funding increases tend to be *less optimistic* when looking ahead.

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?



Asked, “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?,” 55% of superintendents statewide responded that they were somewhat or very optimistic, up from 40% in 2021 and from just 24% in 2019. (The Council did not conduct a survey in 2020.)

The share of superintendents expressing a degree of pessimism declined correspondingly, from 75% in 2019 to 45% in 2022. This included 2% of superintendents who answered this year that their district is *not able now* to provide adequate services. In earlier surveys, between 6% and 8% responded that their districts were then unable to provide adequate services, the equivalent of 50 to 60 districts perhaps in a state of educational insolvency.

Financial Outlook and Funding Increases

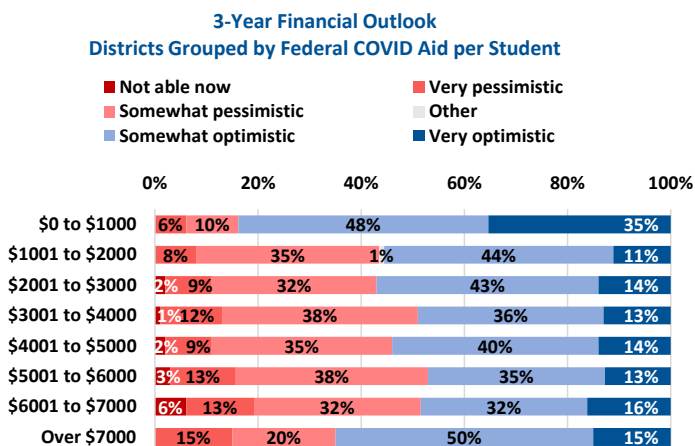
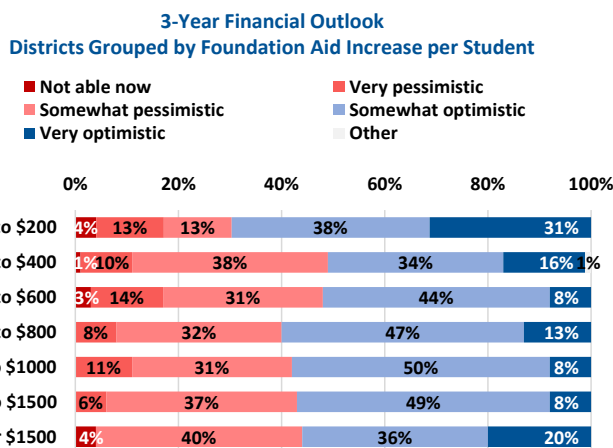
There is discordance between superintendents' perceptions of expected current year budget impacts and longer-term financial outlook.

As explained below, 57% of superintendents statewide cited the end of federal COVID-relief aid as one factor causing them concern in thinking about their schools' financial outlook. Also, most widely cited as the one factor causing superintendents the *greatest concern* was the prospect of inadequate state aid, including changes to Foundation Aid, cited by 32% of superintendents.

Accordingly, it should not surprise that superintendents whose districts are *least reliant* upon those two sources were the *most optimistic* in their financial outlook:

- 69% of superintendents leading districts in the *lowest* band of per student Foundation Aid increases responded that they are *optimistic* about their schools' ability to maintain adequate service. Again, 55% of all superintendents responded that they were optimistic about their schools' financial prospects.
- Likewise, 81% of superintendents serving in the band of districts receiving the lowest federal COVID aid per pupil also professed *optimism*.

Conversely, superintendents of some districts receiving *greater funding* from recent initiatives are *more likely* to state that their schools are *not able now to provide adequate services*: 4% of superintendents receiving Foundation Aid increases over \$1,500 per student shared that appraisal, as did 6% of superintendents leading districts receiving between \$6,001 and \$7,000 per student in federal COVID aid.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Mid-Hudson Valley Suburban: We have become centers for health care, mental health, parent training and education. The system is taking on most social services. School funding must change. Raising taxes yearly continues to create substantial burden on taxpayers and inequalities between schools. It is not truly "public school"—your zip code continues to determine the access to opportunities.

Central New York Rural: I am worried about the financial cliff coming when the pandemic money runs out in 2 years. We added very little staff (in fear of layoffs), but before and after school programs will not be able to continue.

Western New York Small City: Increasingly, the institution of public schools is tasked with addressing and solving all of societal ills. Our staff feels overwhelmed by the significant changes in student behaviors, parent support in dealing with student concerns, and achievement targets. Facing record inflation and the post-pandemic work ethic/work interest decline, very few strong candidates for employment are available at the perceived low starting wages. The tax cap and Foundation Aid limitations while facing record inflation will have immediate and near future implications increasing with the '23-24 budget cycle.

Mohawk Valley Rural: More and more responsibility is falling on our schools and as long as we are funded, we will be able to provide the necessary services that families need. If we are not funded, we cannot be expected to feed kids, transport kids, counsel kids, educate kids, provide health care for kids, and create all year-round programing for kids.

Central New York Rural: During a period of anticipated financial cliff, there is a need to relax the restrictions on carrying a fund balance to help navigate the future. (How many municipalities have a requirement of maxing out at a 4% reserve?)

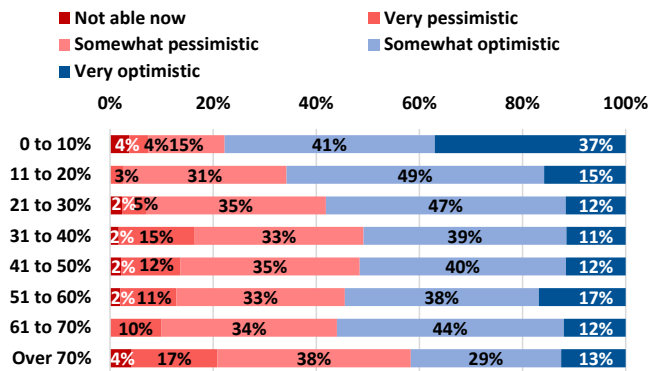
Western New York Suburban: When people decry the increases in the per pupil cost of educating children, and then compare them to other states within the context of test scores they are completely missing the point. Public education is the first, most accessible, most cost efficiently provided, and best of the social safety nets we offer people. Every penny we invest in this safety net confers on children the benefits of a high quality public education, but also allows society to avoid costs in others, like social welfare and the prison system.

Other Patterns in Financial Outlook

Superintendents leading districts with higher student poverty tended to be *less optimistic* in their overall financial outlook: only 42% leading districts in the highest poverty band professed optimism, compared to 78% of superintendents leading districts in the lowest band of student poverty.

Among regions, optimism was lowest in the North Country (36%) and Finger Lakes (43%). It was highest among superintendents in the Mid-Hudson Valley (67%), Long Island (65%), and Lower Hudson Valley (63%).ⁱⁱ

3-Year Financial Outlook
Districts Grouped by Students in Poverty*



* % of students eligible for federal Free and reduced Price Lunch Program

Concerns Affecting Financial Outlook

We asked superintendents, “Which of the following issues cause you concern in thinking about the financial outlook for your school district or BOCES?” and to check all that apply. Then they were asked to select the one issue causing greatest concern.

On average, superintendents cited nine factors as concerns in thinking about the financial outlook for their schools. Eleven of the factors were chosen by a majority of superintendents, led by increasing special education costs (78%), inadequate state aid, including possible changes to Foundation Aid (74%), pressure to provide competitive pay to fill positions (69%), inflation increasing pressure to raise pay, including through collective bargaining (69%), and impact of inflation on cost of fuel and other products (68%).

Which of the following issues cause you concern in thinking about the financial outlook for your school district or BOCES?

	Check any which applies	Which causes the greatest concern
Inadequate state aid, including possible changes in Foundation Aid	74%	31%
Declining student enrollment	55%	10%
Pressure to provide competitive pay to be able to fill positions	69%	9%
Increasing special education costs	78%	8%
The property tax cap	63%	8%
Inflation increasing pressure to raise pay (including through collective bargaining)	69%	7%
End of federal COVID-relief aid (e.g., American Rescue Plan funding)	54%	7%
Expected increases in fixed or hard to control costs (e.g., pensions, health insurance)	66%	6%
Rising levels of economic disadvantage among students (greater student poverty)	64%	4%
Other (Please specify)	4%	2%
Impact of inflation on cost of fuel and other products	68%	1%
Potential costs of transitioning to zero-emission school buses	53%	1%
Growing numbers of students for whom English is not their first language (ELL, ENL students)	32%	1%
High property taxes or the perception of high property taxes among community members	32%	1%
Claims against the district under the Child Victims Act or Adult Victims Act	11%	1%
Increasing student enrollment	7%	1%
Poor or uncertain community support for the schools	6%	1%
Additional costs arising from state or federal mandates	48%	0%
Weak local economy	35%	0%
Costs relating to cybersecurity	31%	0%
Impact of \$10,000 cap on deductibility of state and local taxes on federal returns	16%	0%

The possibility of inadequate state aid, including potential Foundation Aid changes, was most widely cited as *the one factor evoking the greatest concern*, named by 31% of superintendents. This percentage declined from 47% in 2019. The drop-off may be due to the inclusion of new answer options in this year’s survey addressing economic conditions which have emerged in the last three years, including higher inflation and tighter labor markets. For example, 9% of superintendents chose as their greatest concern, “Pressure to provide competitive pay to be able to fill positions”; 7% selected, “Inflation increasing pressure to raise pay (including through collective bargaining)” as their greatest concern.

Financial Concerns: Upstate and Downstate

As the accompanying chart illustrates, there are distinct differences between downstate and upstate superintendents in the factors they cite as concerns affecting the financial outlook for their schools.ⁱⁱⁱ

For example, only 10% of downstate superintendents identified “weak local economy” as a concern, but four times as many upstate superintendents did (42%).

The state mandate to transition to all zero-emission school buses by 2035 is more likely to be cited as a financial concern by upstate rather than downstate superintendents—60% to 28%, respectively. Some of this divergence is undoubtedly due to geographic factors: the average downstate school district occupies 13 square miles; upstate school districts average 92 square miles in size and travel routes are less likely to run in straight lines due to mountains, hills, lakes, and rivers.

Student need concerns are common in both regions, but with differences:

- Downstate superintendents were nearly twice as likely as their upstate colleagues to identify increasing numbers of English Language Learner students as a financial consideration (53% to 27%).
- On the other hand, 70% of upstate superintendents cited growing student poverty as a financial concern; 44% of downstate superintendents did so. Concern about declining overall enrollments is also more prevalent in upstate regions (61% to 33%).

Increasing special education costs are the *most widely cited of all concerns both downstate and upstate* (77% and 79%, respectively).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

North Country Rural: Public schools are the safest place for children but the requirements and demands on staff and faculty are becoming ridiculous with so many external factors trickling into the schools, making it challenging to teach when we are dealing with SEL, poor behaviors, and mental health needs. The increased cost for special education programs is huge, and there are no reserve options which is a huge concern in my district. People who have no business making educational decisions are in power. This is the most rewarding profession but has become more stressful and, in some places, violent. All of this needs to change if there is any hope for new teachers and the profession in the future.

Mohawk Valley Small City: Archaic laws and ways of operation are significant hindrances to how schools operate in today’s world. There has never been more oversight on how a school is managed, but there have been few changes to the law to assist schools in meeting many of these requirements. In some communities, the quick and significant growth of the population (specifically ENL families) is a challenge to keep up with, provide space in our schools, and find certified staff to work with the students. School no longer feels like it is for kids, it feels like a non-stop series of checking legal boxes and most times the laws we are required to follow do not align with common sense or what most parents would feel is best for their child.

Lower Hudson Valley Suburban: The 2% tax cap is slowly but surely eroding the ability for schools to maintain program when more is actually needed to support the wellness of children.

Mid-Hudson Valley Rural: Public schools are expected to assume responsibility for every aspect of raising a child, more so than ever before. Parents and caregivers have turned to the school for everything. We have seen an increase in the number of PK & K students coming to school not toilet trained and the burden associated with helping students develop these necessary life skills is falling on teaching and school support staff. Before- and after-school care are services the school is expected to provide since these services are not available in our rural area. There isn’t additional funding provided to address these new needs, schools must find a way to provide these much-needed services within their already challenging budgetary constraints.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Finger Lakes Rural: Schools have been given the responsibility for the mental health needs of our students, often without support from other local agencies. In our rural area, many children with significant mental health needs cannot get in to see outside providers, our local county agencies had a waiting list of over 500 and stopped taking referrals. This means school counselors and social workers are tasked to provide services that are beyond the scope of the support a student would normally receive in a school setting. We need additional providers and additional training for our staff. We also need the funds to secure both of those items.

Lower Hudson Valley Suburban: The cost to operate a school so that students' needs are met far exceeds the amount of state aid and revenue received. Our community is already highly taxed. Additional state aid, without restrictions, is needed.

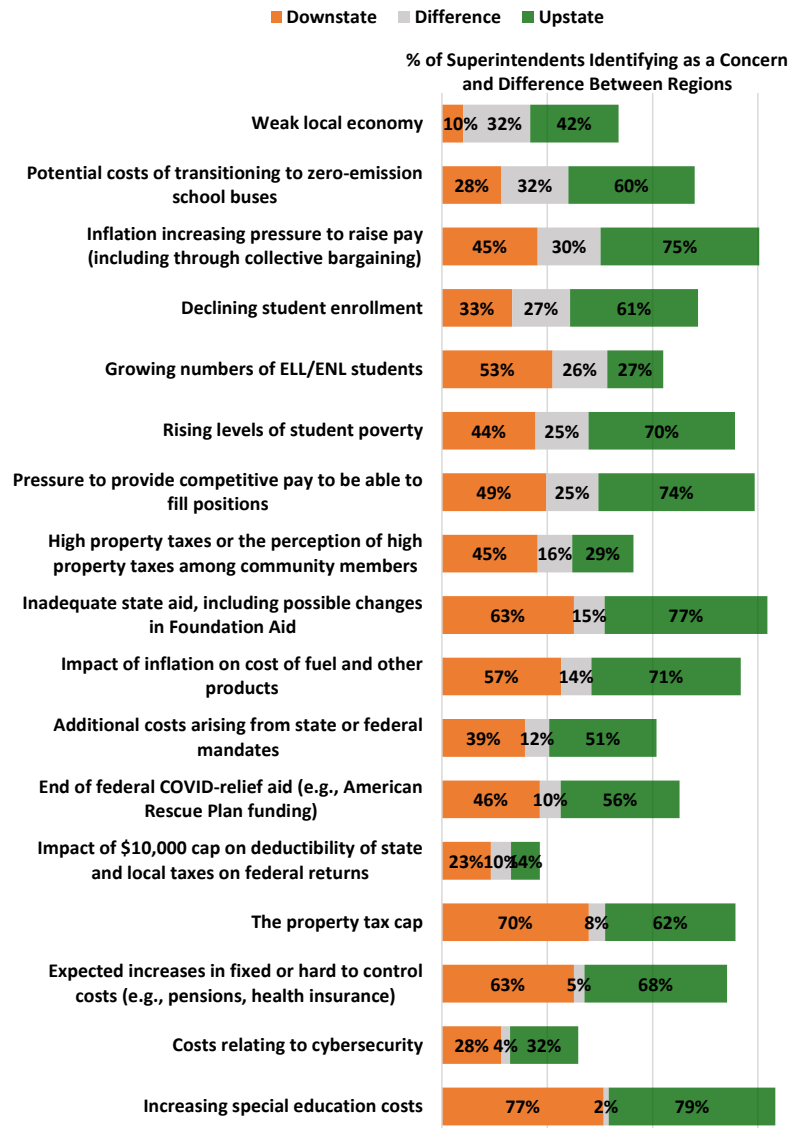
Mid-Hudson Valley Small City: Our schools are serving a more diverse and poorer student population than at any time in my long career. Providing services to meet their needs costs money in areas such as counselors, social workers, attendance officers and ENL teachers. School security and cyber security are two more areas that require more resources than in the past. It is a new world and we must adapt to it. The state must do the same when it comes to funding these new or increased initiatives.

Southern Tier Rural: We are now expected to be responsible for every aspect of a child's growth and development not only during the 180 days but also on the weekends, before school, after school, during school year holidays and across the summer. This approach is exhausting for staff and really requires a great deal of human resources and capital to make it work, which then also requires additional funding and financial stress on the school system. We are paying higher wages than ever in order to get people to provide the additional services for students. At some point the system will not be able to support this.

Long Island Suburban: The high cost of living in New York has a significant impact on the stability of the student population and our ability to recruit and retain exceptional faculty and support staff.

Capital Region Suburban: Our students need us more than ever right now. The pandemic has had staggering effects on our K students as they did not receive strong interventions between the ages of 3-5.

**Financial Concerns Among Superintendents
Upstate and Downstate**



Downstate superintendents were more likely than their upstate colleagues to identify property tax-related issues as a financial concern, while upstate leaders emphasized factors centered on state and federal assistance. This pattern is consistent with variances in dependence on the different revenue sources and in the measures of district wealth and student poverty used in state and federal aid. Compared to the median district downstate, the upstate median district has less than half the property wealth per pupil and more than twice the percentage of kindergarten through grade six students eligible for free or reduced price lunches.

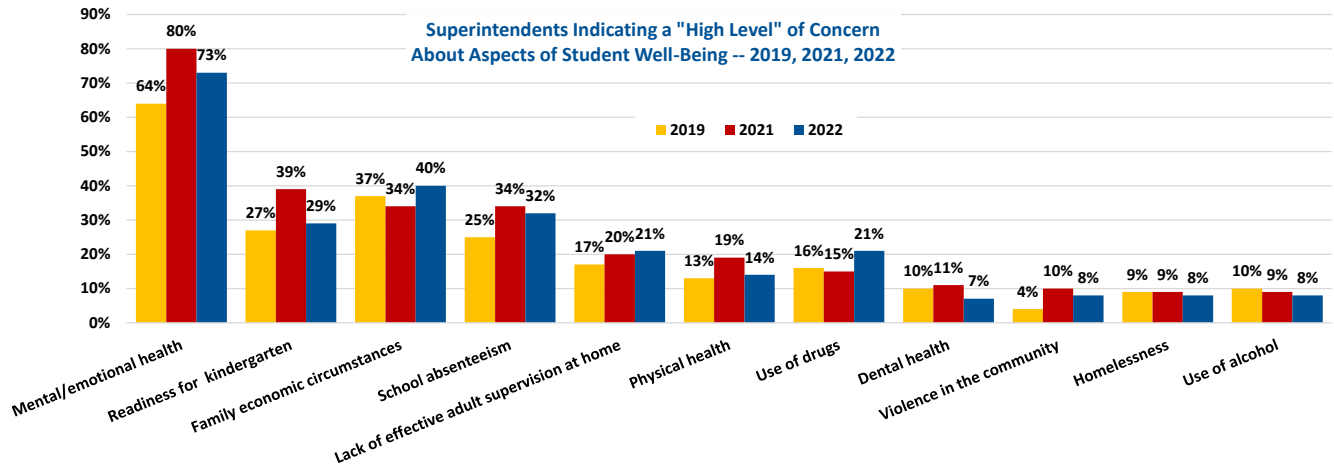
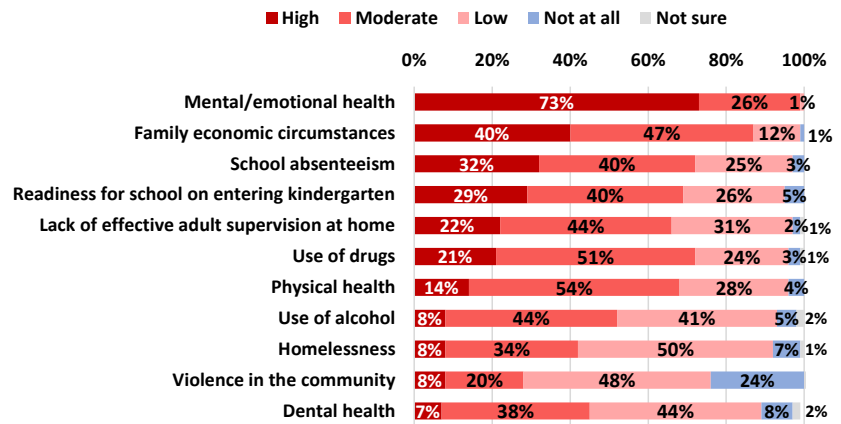
Concerns About Student Well-Being

A theme of recent previous Council survey reports was that then modest increases in state aid had not been keeping pace with growing needs among schoolchildren.

In our 2018 survey, we began asking superintendents about their level of concern over various aspects of well-being of the students in their schools. With the disruptions in life and learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, increases in the percentages of superintendents sharing high levels of concern were predictable and did materialize in our 2021 survey results.

In our latest survey, 73% of superintendents statewide expressed a high level of concern about the **mental/emotional health** of their students, down from 80% in 2021, but still higher than the 64% share in 2019. Another 26% of superintendents reported a moderate level of concern, leaving only 1% expressing low concern.

Superintendents' Levels of Concern about Aspects of Student Well-Being—2022



We found a correlation between level of concern over student mental/emotional health and expectation that their district budgets this year will improve related services: 49% of superintendents who expressed a high level of concern expect a *significant positive impact* on student mental health services due to their district budgets, compared to 33% among those expressing a moderate level of concern.

We also found increases in concern in 2021 over **school absenteeism** and **readiness for kindergarten**. The percentage of superintendents reporting a high level of concern over kindergarten readiness rose from 27% in 2019 to 34% in 2021, but dropped back to 29% in our latest survey. Concern about absenteeism has remained elevated, with 32% indicating a high level of concern this year, compared to 34% in 2021 and 25% three years ago.

High concern about multiple aspects of student well-being tended to be most prevalent among superintendents leading city school districts and districts higher in student poverty or lower in local revenue raising capacity.

% of Superintendents Indicating a "High Level" of Concern About Aspects of Student Well-Being (Red font indicates a result at least 20% above the statewide result)											
	Mental/emotional health	Readiness for school on entering kindergarten	Family economic circumstances	School absenteeism	Lack of effective adult supervision at home	Physical health	Use of drugs	Dental health	Violence in the community	Homelessness	Use of alcohol
NEW YORK STATE	73%	40%	32%	29%	22%	21%	14%	8%	8%	8%	7%
District Type											
Rural	76%	33%	50%	36%	26%	16%	19%	10%	3%	6%	8%
Suburban	66%	16%	20%	19%	10%	8%	20%	3%	6%	6%	8%
City	70%	51%	49%	68%	41%	14%	32%	8%	35%	27%	5%
% of Students in Poverty (% of K-6 Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program)											
0 to 10%	59%	4%	4%	4%	7%	8%	26%	0%	0%	4%	22%
11 to 20%	66%	3%	5%	8%	3%	5%	11%	0%	0%	0%	8%
21 to 30%	72%	14%	14%	14%	5%	2%	9%	0%	2%	5%	0%
31 to 40%	75%	25%	34%	28%	11%	17%	15%	3%	5%	5%	8%
41 to 50%	68%	27%	47%	34%	20%	9%	18%	9%	5%	9%	6%
51 to 60%	81%	42%	54%	35%	35%	16%	27%	9%	2%	5%	7%
61 to 70%	76%	38%	57%	59%	28%	15%	22%	13%	10%	14%	6%
Over 70%	63%	63%	67%	79%	63%	33%	46%	21%	54%	33%	13%
Combined Wealth Ratio (District Property Wealth and Resident Income per Student Compared to State Average—lower is poorer; 1.000 is average)											
0 to .400	85%	62%	67%	69%	49%	36%	21%	26%	26%	18%	14%
.401 to .600	77%	53%	35%	36%	29%	20%	16%	7%	5%	5%	11%
.601 to .800	74%	39%	33%	35%	21%	22%	12%	4%	8%	5%	6%
.801 to 1.000	72%	28%	32%	9%	11%	22%	4%	6%	9%	7%	4%
1.001 to 1.500	60%	28%	24%	11%	13%	15%	9%	9%	0%	9%	2%
1.501 to 2.000	67%	6%	22%	6%	0%	17%	11%	6%	0%	17%	6%
2.001 to 4.000	60%	24%	4%	4%	8%	12%	17%	8%	0%	8%	8%
Over 4.000	60%	20%	10%	0%	0%	0%	11%	10%	0%	0%	0%

Pandemic Experiences

Our 2022 survey included a new section inquiring about experiences of schools since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Superintendents were asked about the extent to which each of a series of statements is true for their schools, with answer options ranging between “completely true” and “not at all true.”

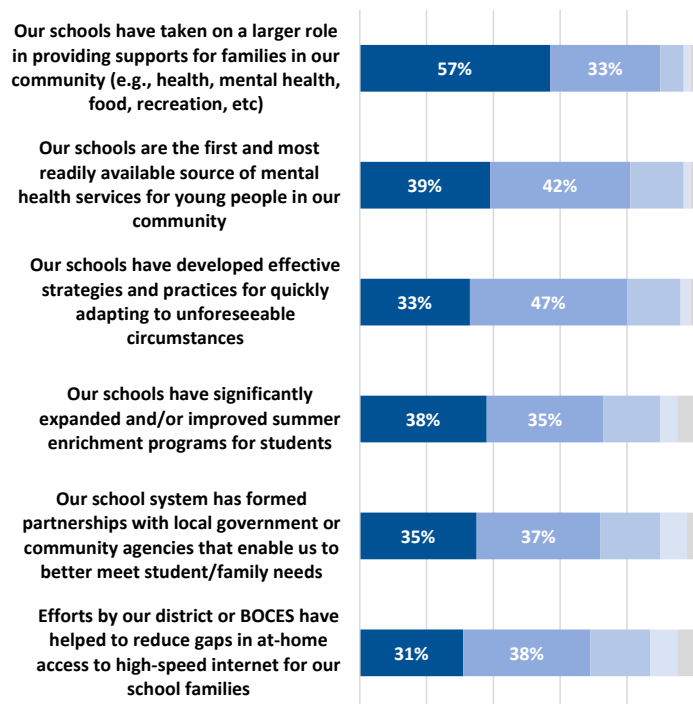
Our survey also invited superintendents to offer open-ended reactions to the question, “*What do you believe it is most important for policymakers, news sources, and the public to understand about New York’s public schools today?*” Nearly three hundred superintendents devoted time to share answers.

Schools Taking on Wider Responsibilities

One recurring theme that superintendents have stressed both in comments for our survey and in anecdotal exchanges is that their schools have taken on responsibilities for helping children and families with a wider array of needs beyond instruction and learning. This is borne out in our questions about school district experiences since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Superintendent Perceptions of School Experiences Since Pandemic Onset Schools Taking on Larger Roles

■ Completely true
 ■ Mostly true
 ■ About half true
 ■ Slightly true
 ■ Not at all true



For example, 90% of superintendents statewide responded that it is either completely or mostly true that, “*Our schools have taken on a larger role in providing supports for families in our community (e.g., health, mental health, food, recreation, other supports).*” The statement was characterized as *completely true* by 57%.

Statewide, 39% of superintendents answered that it is completely true that, “*Our schools are the first and most readily available source of mental health services for young people in our community,*” with another 42% calling the statement mostly true.

Over two-thirds of superintendents responded that it was either completely or mostly true that their schools had formed partnerships with other local agencies to better meet student and family needs, expanded summer enrichment programs, helped reduce gaps in at-home internet access, and developed capacity to effectively respond to unforeseen circumstances.

Superintendents leading higher student poverty, lower district wealth, and city school systems were especially likely to completely agree that their districts have taken on a larger role in providing a range of supports to families and children—65% of city superintendents completely agreed with that statement, as did 61% of superintendents leading districts where over 30% of students came from families with incomes low enough to qualify for the free or reduced price lunch (FRPL) program (41% of other superintendents completely agreed).

District Groupings with High Percentages of Superintendents Completely Agreeing that "Our schools have taken on a larger role in providing supports for families in our community (e.g., health, mental health, food, recreation, other supports)"	
Group	% Completely Agree
Mohawk Valley	71%
Finger Lakes	68%
Western New York	67%
Central New York	66%
City	65%
Capital Region	65%
80% or Less of State Average Wealth/Student	65%
61-70% of Students FRPL-eligible	64%
Rural	62%
New York State	57%

Over 65% of superintendents in each of the Central New York, Finger Lakes, Mohawk Valley, and Western New York regions also completely agreed.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Southern Tier Rural: School districts are now primarily responsible for nearly all issues involving youth in the community including mental, physical and dental health, nutrition, internet access, family issues, political, racial and religious conflicts, etc. Teaching and learning is only a part of what we are expected to address... This is a big and challenging task to take on the expanded expectations.

Western New York Small City: Schools are expected to “do it all” which means we are working an inch deep and a mile wide, diluting our focus on instruction. While that is necessary for the needs of our students/community, we need to acknowledge that we still have students the same number of hours a day and same number days per year as when I was a student (starting over 50 years ago), but we must do so much more now than then.

Finger Lakes Rural: Access to reliable broadband for rural students limits their growth in digital literacy. For many of our students and staff, WiFi is not available at their homes, meaning there are no cable lines down their road. For more than 60% of our families, the cost is too high even if it was available. For those who have access, it is often too slow and/or unreli-able. Our students' digital literacy lags significantly behind their suburban and urban counterparts due to limited access across their life-time.

Long Island Suburban: Schools are the centerpiece of every community and have come to be relied upon for more and more each year. The pandemic years provide keystone examples. With that comes the propensity to point a finger at schools when society falls short. Schools, staff and students should command more respect—many outside of education have no idea about how much time and energy is put in to support a school district community...

Mohawk Valley Rural: Public Schools do tremendous amount to serve their communities. They use limited resources to educate, counsel, advise and develop students to be successful in life. They support families when other governmental agencies have long waiting lists and are not able to provide the support necessary.

Lower Hudson Valley Suburban: The impact on mental health on both school employees and students over the last few years has been immense! We need to find ways to provide support to our students in our care while also helping our employees feel safe and supported in their workplace.

Superintendents in Central New York and the Capital Region were most likely to respond that it was completely true that their schools have become the leading source of mental health services for young people in their communities, with 51% and 49%, respectively, completely agreeing with that observation.

Fifty percent of superintendents leading districts where more than 60% of students are FRPL-eligible also responded completely true, as did 44% of rural superintendents.

District Groupings with High Percentages of Superintendents Completely Agreeing that "Our schools are the first and most readily available source of mental health services for young people in our community"	
Group	% Completely Agree
61-70% of Students FRPL-eligible	56%
Central New York	51%
Capital Region	49%
60% or Less of State Average Wealth/Student	49%
51-60% of Students FRPL-eligible	47%
Western New York	44%
New York State	39%

Hiring Shortages

Challenges in filling positions emerged as profound concern for many districts before the onset of the pandemic and have worsened since. Superintendents commonly cite hiring shortages as an obstacle to responding to student needs and sometimes to fully expending new resources.

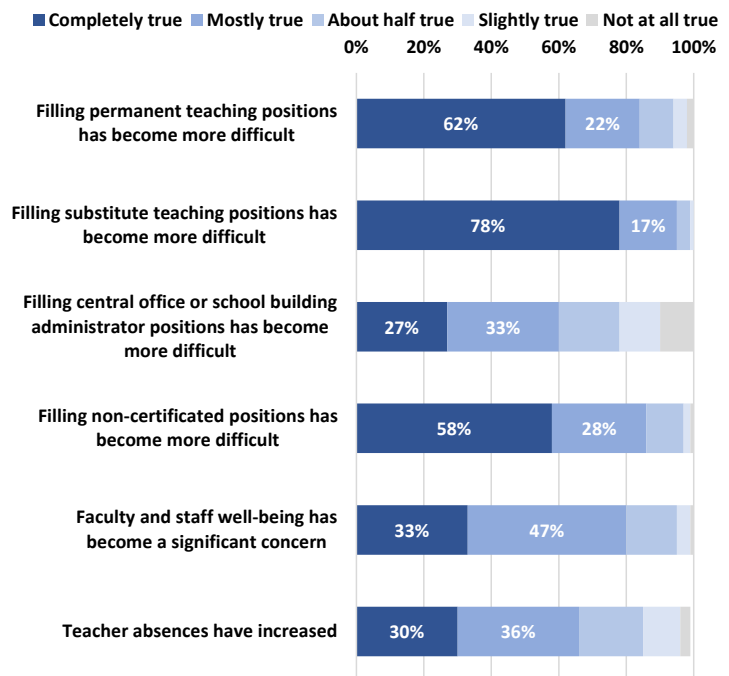
For example, majorities of superintendents statewide agreed that it is completely true that filling permanent and substitute teaching positions has become more difficult, as has filling positions not requiring professional certification—bus drivers and custodial, food service, and clerical workers, for example. For each of these categories, over 80% of superintendents responded that it was either completely or mostly true that filling positions has become harder.

Our 2021 survey included a question illustrating in greater detail some of the specific challenges districts have been facing. It inquired about difficulties in filling 38 categories of positions. For example, 46% of superintendents statewide reported being unable to fill a bus driver position and 45% said their schools had been unable to fill substitute teaching positions. Difficulties were widespread in hiring for secondary level special education, foreign language, technology education, and family and consumer science teachers, and for finding library media specialists, aides for students with disabilities, custodial workers, and school nurses.^{iv}

Illustrating a challenge that schools have experienced in responding to student mental health needs, 22% of superintendents in our 2021 survey reported their district had been unable to fill a school psychologist position and 12% had been unable to hire a school social worker.

Superintendent Perceptions of School Experiences Since Pandemic Onset

Personnel Concerns



Superintendents of high poverty and low wealth school districts were most likely to agree that filling permanent teaching positions has become more difficult since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, 88% of superintendents leading districts with the highest student poverty agreed that it is completely true that filling permanent teaching positions has become more difficult, as did 82% of superintendents of the lowest wealth districts. Again, 62% of superintendents statewide agreed.

District Groups With High Percentages of Superintendents Responding Completely True That Filling Permanent Teaching Positions has Become More Difficult	
District Group	%
Southern Tier	90%
Over 70% of Students FRPL-eligible	88%
40% or Less of State Average Wealth/Student	82%
61-70% of Students FRPL-eligible	80%
Mohawk Valley	77%
41-60% of State Average Wealth/Student	77%
North Country	72%
Rural	71%
Finger Lakes	70%
New York State	62%

In our 2021 survey, superintendents serving in the Southern Tier, North Country, and Mohawk Valley were most likely to report hardship in meeting staffing needs; that remained true for permanent teaching positions in our 2022 results. Seventy-one percent of rural superintendents said it was completely true that filling permanent teaching positions had become more difficult, compared to 65% of city superintendents, and 49% of suburban district leaders.

Explaining Teacher Shortages

We sought explanations from superintendents for challenges in finding teachers, asking them to rank three leading reasons from a list.

Most widely cited as a cause for teacher shortages was, “Starting salaries for teachers are not competitive with other professions requiring similar education,” picked by 103 superintendents as their top explanation and by 44% of superintendents as one of their three ranked options. This is consistent with our finding that 69% of superintendents cited pressures to offer competitive salaries is a concern in considering financial prospects for their schools.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Southern Tier Small City: It is becoming increasingly difficult to staff positions, in schools with high quality educators. It is critically important to address this issue! Salaries need to be competitive and support for new teachers is a must.

North Country Rural: Public should understand that there is a major lack of certified teachers. Negativity on social media and the requirements from our state will continue to be the cause of this shortage until something is done to correct it at the state level.

Mohawk Valley Rural: New York State schools are not sustainable due to the lack of viable employees for all units in the district. No teacher in the candidate pool pipeline is a huge concern. We can't find aides, bus drivers or administrative support.

Capital Region Rural: The lack of educators available to fill roles has had a tremendous negative impact on both the academic and the climate of schools. As we have had to reduce opportunities for instruction due to a lack of qualified teachers, it has impacted the climate of the professional staff. Adults are being pulled from their responsibilities to cover classrooms, thus not providing the much needed services to their students. This leads to quicker burnout and a sense of hopelessness. There does not appear to be a solution on the horizon and I fear more people will choose to retire or leave the field all together, which will make matters worse.

Western New York Rural: We want our great teachers to encourage their children to go into education and they are not. Starting salaries for our level of education is a joke, people do not respect school employees and we do not feel as if our society values us! The roll out of APPR and Common Core was awful. Just as we started to recover from that, we were hit with the pandemic and teachers once again stopped recommending to their children that they pursue a career in education. Like all major issues, it is multifaceted and complicated. There are not "one or two" reasons why there is a teacher shortage... it is a result of a perfect storm of sorts and now educators are tired.

Long Island Suburban: Make the profession known as the one that creates all others!!!

Southern Tier Small City: We need teachers! We need support staff! We need bus drivers! we need people who love and care for our children!

What factors do you believe contribute to difficulties which districts experience in filling teaching positions?					
Responses	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Weighted Score	% Selecting as a Factor
Starting salaries for teachers are not competitive with other professions requiring similar education	103	60	42	471	44%
Teaching is not perceived as a respected profession	82	75	65	461	48%
Political controversies associated with schools	48	61	67	333	38%
State requirements made it harder to become a teacher	65	36	48	315	32%
Districts hiring teachers away from other districts	39	62	33	274	29%
Educators advising young people against pursuing teaching as a career	37	39	53	242	28%
Broader economic trends affecting student decisions on college majors	32	34	51	215	25%
Reduced pension benefits for beginning teachers compared to those in Tier IV	14	39	44	164	21%
Increased overall demand for teachers due to improved funding	19	26	28	137	16%
Personal well-being concerns	12	29	19	113	13%
Other	13	3	14	59	6%

Next came, “Teaching is not perceived as a respected profession,” chosen by 82 superintendents their leading explanation and by a higher share of superintendents than any other option as one of three top factors (48%).

“Political controversies associated with schools” was the third-ranked factor among superintendents. As examples, we cited COVID-requirements, “critical race theory,” gender identity, and book-banning. Given that shortages pre-dated the emergence of most of these issues, they may be discouraging *future* entrants, as well as contributing to current departures from the profession.

Fourth-ranked was “State requirements made it harder to become a teacher.” The Board of Regents has taken recent actions to reduce some entrance prerequisites and provide additional flexibility in certification areas.

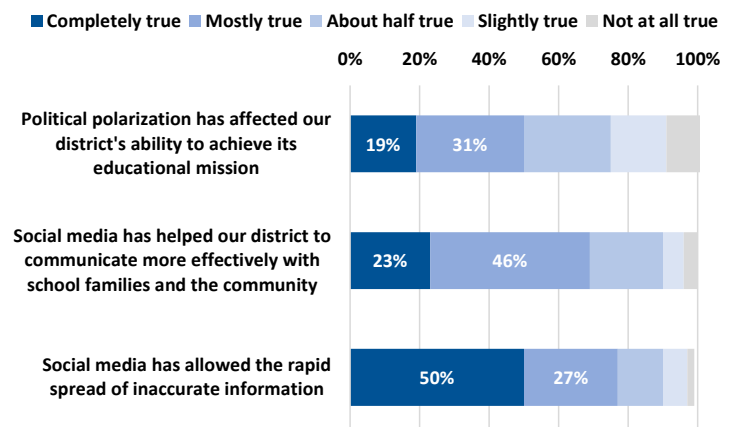
Personal well-being concerns” ranked only above “Other” as an explanation for teacher shortages. Yet in our questions regarding pandemic experiences, 80% of superintendents agreed that it is completely or mostly true that, “Faculty and staff well-being have become a significant concern.” Anecdotally, superintendents commonly observe that the additional demands now being managed by schools, both instructional and otherwise, have contributed to employee burnout.

Political Polarization and Social Media

In open-ended comments, many superintendents lamented the effects of political polarization upon the work of their schools and many faulted social media as a corrosive influence.

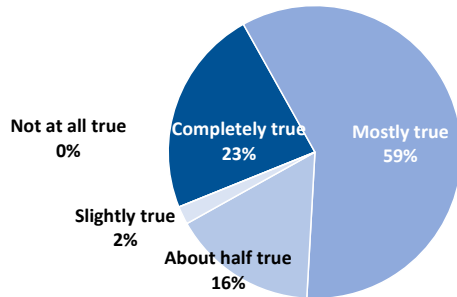
Asked to reflect on experiences in their schools since the onset of the pandemic, 50% of superintendents responded that it is either completely or mostly true that, “*Political polarization has affected our district's ability to achieve its educational mission.*” Social media appears to be a mixed-bag for school leaders: 23% of superintendents completely agreed with the statement, “*Social media has helped our district to communicate more effectively with school families and the community,*” but more than twice that number—50%—answered that it is completely true that, “*Social media has allowed the rapid spread of inaccurate information.*” Open-ended comment references to social media are predominantly negative.

Superintendent Perceptions of School Experiences Since Pandemic Onset
Political Polarization and Social Media



Still, 82% of superintendents responded that it is either completely or mostly true that, “My community is supportive of my school system’s mission, both academically and financially;” only 2% characterized the statement as slightly or not at all true.

Superintendent Perceptions: "My community is supportive of my school system's mission, both academically and financially"



Conclusion

New York’s public schools face challenging and uncertain prospects. As our survey emphasizes, schools have taken on additional responsibilities for helping children and families with issues beyond academics and learning. At the same time, recently released state and national assessment results confirm what was always anticipated: educators must persevere in helping students to recover ground lost due to disruptions in learning and life since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hiring difficulties have imperiled the capacity of many schools to fully meet both the academic and other the needs of their students. The scheduled expiration of federal help and the potential of a recession to wreck state finances cast doubt on whether schools will have all the resources their students will need.

But there are reasons for hope. One was the return to normalcy with the start of this school year. “Joy” is the word which captures the sentiment superintendents commonly shared in describing their schools’ openings this past September. One upstate superintendent characterized this year’s start as resembling a rainbow after more than two years of storms.

We can, hope as well, that the entire year will proceed with fewer disruptions for students and for educators. Reflecting on the year passed, superintendents have noted that while closings of entire schools due to COVID were rarer than the year before and therefore less visible, many individual students and teachers still lost time in school due to illness or to quarantine requirements which have since been streamlined.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Capital Region Small City: Our current reality is not what it was 20 or 30 years ago. The societal, economic, and cultural landscape has changed. What was good then is different now. We need policymakers to be real, current, and realistic—know what issues schools are facing, versus what the public demands—most times it is unrealistic and toxic (thank you, social media). What was intolerable years ago is everyday life today. These entities need to understand just how many factors play against schools, especially policy and funding (or lack thereof). Schools continue to battle to find the balance between educating our kids, while in many cases also raising, coaching, mentoring, parenting, feeding, caring and loving each of them. Give us the tools, and the courtesy, to do our job. Using good judgment, common sense, and a positive disposition lends itself to find the balance we seek. It takes all of us, not just a chosen few policymakers, to move us forward.

North Country Rural: We are doing more work now than ever before, and very often being criticized more heavily than ever before. The vast sea of misinformation about what is and is not happening in schools makes it more difficult to bridge the gap between school and community.

Long Island Suburban: Our schools are places where we have a responsibility to meet the needs of all students. Their varied cultures, experiences and perspectives should play a role in our work and not be used as a cudgel to advance the political narratives of the adults in our communities.

Mid-Hudson Valley Suburban: District leaders are working hard to overcome the negativity that is often front and center of political agendas. We have increased our communication with stakeholders, only to have efforts thrown in our faces. We want all children to feel a sense of belonging within our schools. But until the media and policymakers stop politicizing every effort made by districts, we will not begin to make a dent in reaching all students. Too much time is spent trying to undo the negativity that is perpetrated upon schools as the enemy.

Central New York Suburban: In these challenging financial and political times, schools are being asked to do more than ever before to support students and families, while navigating some very polarizing social issues that are prevalent in our communities and schools. Schools continue to do what is right, not what's easy.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Upstate BOCES: Public schools are the only way to level the playing field for all children to be able to become contributing members to a democratic republic. We are the single most important institution in the country and we need the support of all in order to make it work for everyone.

Finger Lakes Rural: New York continues to be a leader in the nation when it comes to public education. Students and families are afforded far greater opportunities in many communities because of public schools—sports are not "pay to play," more transportation [than in] other states, extracurricular offerings at no cost to families, far-reaching special education regs above fed requirements, exploratory classes in middle school, strong K12 visual and performing arts programs, robust career and tech ed.

North Country Rural: Schools are expected to be the "glue" connecting students' past, present, and future; the locus of civic training, readiness, and civil discourse; the reflection of all values of all people at all times; and the facilitators of cultural, social, and economic equity. Every one of these elements is good and noble, yet collectively, the task seems overwhelming. Luckily, most of our students, faculty, staff, and community members see each of these issues as interconnected and have the patience and understanding to support schools' efforts to help tomorrow be better than today. The collective support is inspiring and allows our educators to truly work through the herculean task of shaping the future.

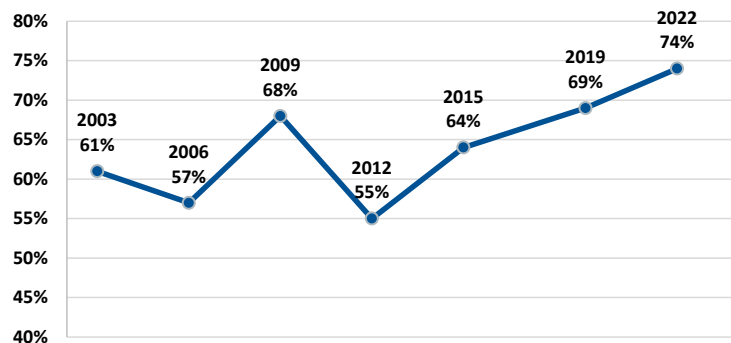
Upstate BOCES: It is critical to highlight the fact that public education is the bedrock of our democracy. Public education is a great equalizer of equity and opportunities for all students. We must send a united message around the importance of public education to ensure that our democracy continues for generations to come and we are able to prepare all of our students for their futures.

Western New York Suburban: No institution in our state has been more able to adapt to these needs—and do so in the face of increasing regulation and litigation—than New York State's public schools. We have proven ourselves worthy of greater investment so that we can address the challenges that require our attention. We aren't perfect. We make mistakes. We have room to grow. But proof of true excellence in accomplishing our modern mission is abundant in every community across the state.

Also, as our survey highlights, superintendents foresee recent state and federal funding infusions as enabling wide improvements in the opportunities and assistance their schools will offer to the students they serve.

For all the disruptions, challenges, and uncertainties, superintendents remain enthusiastic about the work they have been entrusted to lead. In periodic surveys going back to 2003, we have asked superintendents to what extent they agree or disagree, "I like the superintendency well enough to encourage a child showing aptitude to pursue it?" In our survey last month, 74% agreed—a greater share than in any prior survey. This was predominantly true even among superintendents pessimistic about the financial outlook for the schools or who see political polarization as harming their districts' capacity to fulfill their mission—74% and 71%, respectively, agreed.

% of Superintendents agreeing, "I like the superintendency well enough to encourage a child showing aptitude to pursue it."



In their open-ended comments for our survey, superintendents commonly wrote with pride about the work of their schools and with admiration for the efforts of their colleagues and employees. They perceive their schools as cornerstones of their communities, as essential gateways to opportunity, and as pillars of American democracy.

ⁱ The survey was conducted online through K12 Insight, a Council partner, between October 5 and 25, 2022. The Council conducted similar surveys each year from 2011 through 2019 and again in 2021. New York City is not included in this survey; the City alone serves 39% of the state's schoolchildren and deserves separate attention.

ⁱⁱ These are the regions used in our survey:

- **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)
- **North Country** (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence Counties)

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- **Mohawk Valley** (Fulton, Herkimer, Montgomery, Oneida, Schoharie Counties)
 - **Central New York** (Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tompkins Counties)
 - **Southern Tier** (Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego, Schuylar, Steuben, Tioga Counties)
 - **Finger Lakes** (Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, Yates Counties)
 - **Western New York** (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Niagara Counties)

ⁱⁱⁱ For the purposes of our survey and the report, “downstate” is comprised of Long Island and the Lower Hudson Valley and “upstate” is comprised of the remaining regions as defined in the preceding footnote.

^{iv} See https://www.nycoss.org/nycosssdocs/Advocacy2122/2204_Hiring_Issue_Crosstabs.xlsx for tables presenting results broken down by region, community type, and student poverty level for our November 2021 survey questions on school district hiring challenges.