

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** November 30, 2022

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## Superintendents' Survey Finds Mission of Schools Expanding in Wake of COVID-19; State and Federal Aid is Enabling Wide Improvements in Key Student Services

**ALBANY, NY**—Schools have taken on a wider mission in helping students and families with concerns beyond academics. Infusions of federal and state aid are enabling schools to improve many services and opportunities for students. These are key themes in a report on survey findings released today by the New York State Council of School Superintendents.

- [Complete Survey Report](#)
- [Power Point Slides](#)

Council Executive Director Charles Dedrick said, “In their open-ended comments for our survey, the one theme emphasized most often by superintendents is that, while schools have often been a hub for many community services, that role has expanded dramatically in recent years.”

Dedrick added, “As one of our members observed, ‘Public education is the first, most efficiently provided, most accessible, and best of all the safety nets we provide for children.’”

Asked about experiences since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, 90% of superintendents responded that it is completely true (57%) or mostly true (33%) that, “our schools “have taken on a larger role in providing supports for families in our community (e.g., health, mental health, food, recreation, etc.)” Eighty-one percent (81%) agreed that it is completely or mostly true that “our schools are the first and most readily accessible source of mental health services in our community.”

Council Deputy Director Robert Lowry said, “It comes through loudly and clearly from our survey that state Foundation Aid increases and federal COVID-relief assistance are enabling schools all across our state to make improvements in key student services—especially in student mental health services and extra academic help, but also basic instruction at every school level.”

In nine prior annual surveys between 2011 and 2019, only twice did a majority of superintendents statewide anticipate that their district budgets would result in improvements any service area. But in this year’s survey, majorities expect improvements 11 service areas, including core instruction in elementary school (74%), middle school (66%), and high school (63%), and in student mental health services (82%), extra academic help (79%), summer enrichment programs (72%), school security (71%), and prekindergarten (58%).

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Lowry added, “It’s especially encouraging that our survey found superintendents leading higher poverty districts are generally more likely to foresee improvements in what their schools will be able to offer to students.”

Increases in state and federal assistance have also produced greater optimism among superintendents about longer-term financial prospects for their schools.

Fifty-five percent (55%) of superintendents responded that they were somewhat or very optimistic that, looking ahead three years or so, their schools will be able to fund services adequate to the needs of their students, up from just 25% in 2019. There has been a corresponding drop in pessimistic responses, from 75% to 45% over the same period.

But concerns about sustainability are common. Fifty-four percent (54%) of superintendents identified “end of federal COVID-relief aid” was one of the factors causing them concern in thinking about the financial outlook for their schools. The possibility of “Inadequate state aid, including possible changes in Foundation Aid” was most widely cited as the one factor causing greatest concern, named by 32% of superintendents.

Hiring shortages are seen as imperiling the capacity of schools to meet the needs of students. Majorities of superintendents responded that it is completely true that, since the onset of the pandemic, it has become more difficult to fill both teaching positions (62%) and non-certified positions (e.g. custodial, clerical, food service, and student transportation positions; 58%). Superintendents leading higher poverty, lower wealth, and rural school districts were especially likely to report hiring challenges.

The Council survey also identified concerns among superintendents about challenges arising from political polarization and social media. But in a question on job satisfaction, 74% of superintendents agreed that they like their work enough to recommend the role to a child showing aptitude—the highest figure in the 20 years that Council surveys have included that question.

The survey was conducted online, between October 5 and 25, 2022. Four hundred sixty-seven superintendents submitted complete responses to the survey, a response rate of 64.6%.