



## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Chief School Officers Outline Legislative Priorities

Saratoga Springs, January 20, 2023 - WSWHE BOCES administrators and board members; chief school officers from 31 school districts along with their board presidents; elected officials including Ashby, Stec, Simpson, Smullen, Tedisco, Woerner, Walsh; and business leaders gathered virtually for the 2023 Legislative Breakfast. Although originally planned to be held in-person, organizers pivoted to a virtual event due to inclement weather. The WSWHE BOCES Chief School Officers (CSO) Advocacy Committee outlined their 2023 legislative priorities which include: school aid, increased state support for career and technical education, support for universal free meals for students, and school workforce development issues.

To ensure that all students are supported, the CSOs asked that the following provisions be included for **school aid in the 2023-24 State Budget**:

- A due minimum increase for all districts, regardless of Foundation Aid phase-in level.
- A “save-harmless” provision to ensure a stable funding baseline for all districts.
- Fully fund expense-based aids.
- Support an initial evaluation of the current cost to educate a successful student.

They also requested an increase in **State support for Career and Technical Education (CTE)** programs which provide students with essential skills that prepare them for college and careers. However, the existing BOCES aid formula for CTE programs operated by BOCES only allows districts to receive aid on the first \$30,000 of a BOCES instructor’s salary. The average salary of a CTE teacher is now at least \$65,000. To ensure that students have access to the CTE pathway, the CSOs are requesting an increase in the amount of CTE teacher salary that is aidable.

For the last 2 years, schools have been able to offer **free breakfast and lunch** for their students and received reimbursement at the free-lunch rate for all meals served. This practice, adopted as part of the federal government’s reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted a pre-pandemic reality, that students will learn more effectively when they are not hungry. In addition, more students who need school meals will take advantage of them when their peers are also accessing them. Rather than returning to the pre-COVID-19 practice of having some families pay in full or in part for school meals, the CSOs requested maintaining the availability of universal meals at no cost to families.

The CSOs are requesting that policymakers consider increasing flexibilities in teacher certification requirements and retiree employee employment as well as Tier 6 reform to **address teacher, bus driver and other staff shortages** that are making it increasingly difficult to fully and properly staff buildings.

Several additional ongoing issues relating to small group health insurance standards, increasing the threshold for capital projects, and transitioning to zero-emission buses were also discussed.

For a full description of the priorities, [please click here](#).

“On behalf of the school districts in the WSWHE BOCES region, I want to thank our elected representatives for their continued advocacy and hard work on behalf of their school communities. The support our delegation has continually shown for our students is amazing and we are incredibly grateful for their partnership,” said Hartford Central School District Superintendent and Chair of the CSO Advocacy Committee, Andrew Cook.

Cook added, “we believe the legislative priorities discussed today will benefit students across New York State and we are looking forward to working side-by-side with our representatives to ensure that every student in our region has the best educational experience possible.”

Andrea Crisafulli, owner and president of Crisafulli Bros. Plumbing and Heating Contractors, Inc spoke to the guests about the importance of CTE to her industry. She said she fully supported the CSO Advocacy Committee’s priority of increasing the BOCES aid cap on CTE instructors’ salaries which would mean greater access to CTE programs for more students.

“BOCES is a critical pipeline,” said Crisafulli.

She said that going into the trades puts young people ahead of their peers who might be going to college and are starting their career with college debt. At Crisafulli Bros. a young person can start in an entry-level position, right out of high school, at \$20 per hour, earning around \$40,000 per year with full benefits. With three years at the company, employees will be earning \$60,000. She said we would like to see schools starting the conversation about the trades at an earlier age and wants to engage school counselors in the process. She said her company takes every opportunity it can to be active in workforce development.

Crisafulli’s message for the legislators was, “someone has to move the dial for us. We are desperate.”

Alumni Shae Gignon, a 2022 graduate of Ballston Spa High School, spoke about her experience in the construction trades program and how she landed a job right out of high school working for Whitbeck Construction.

Gignon said, “BOCES set me up for a lifelong career without having to go to college and sent me to my dream job.”

All of the legislators indicated that the priorities that were outlined were all reasonable and that they would support the CSO Advocacy Committee.

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