



**TESTIMONY ON FY 24 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL:  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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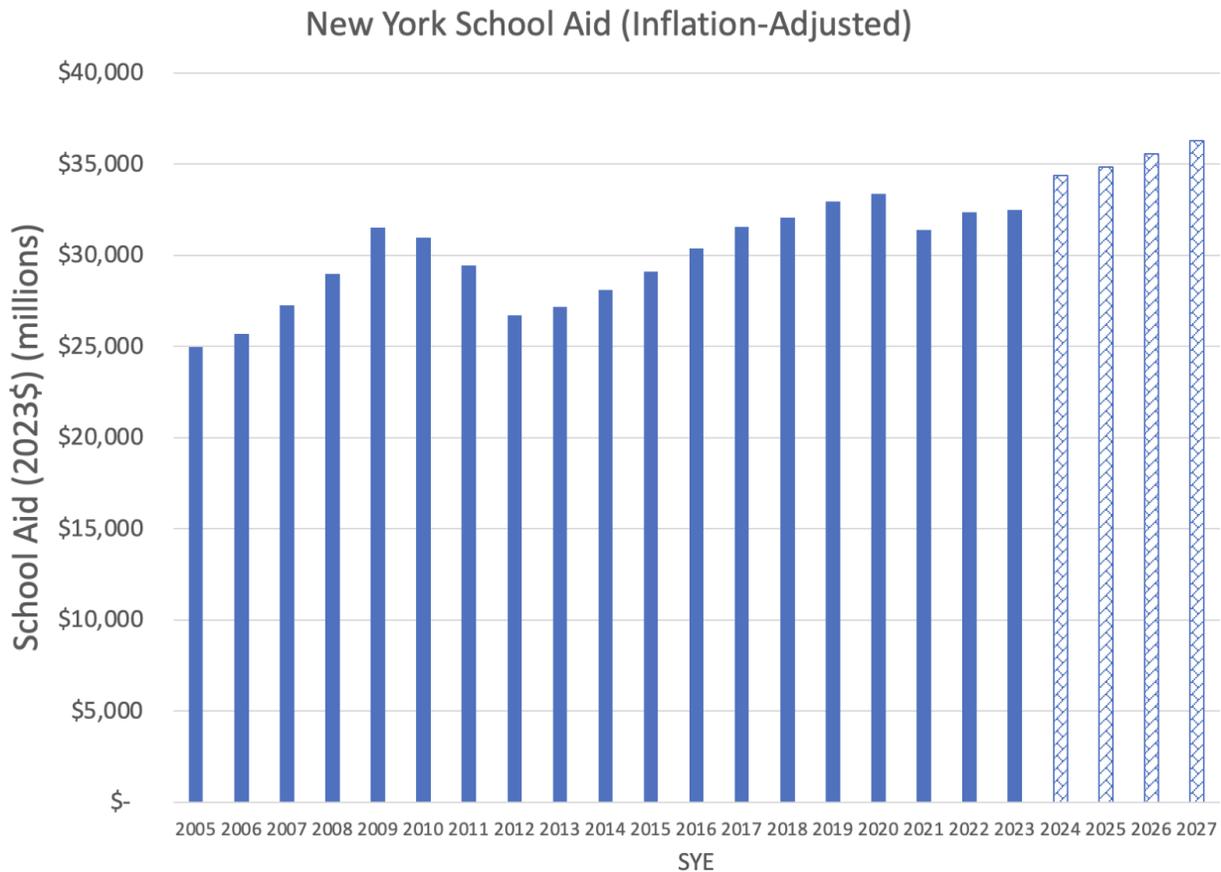
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The school aid appropriation sought in the Executive Budget proposal — \$34.4 billion in school year 2023-24 — would propel state spending for the public elementary and secondary education system to a level that is unprecedented in multiple respects.

- It would be the largest-ever single-year expenditure of state funds, for any purpose, even on an inflation-adjusted basis.
- It is being considered with seemingly complete awareness that the state will struggle to maintain this spending level in the outyears, based on budget gaps forecast by the Division of the Budget in fiscal 2025, 2026 and 2027.
- It comes amid a multi-decade decline in public school enrollment that was accelerated by the pandemic.

**ANYTHING BUT “AUSTERE”**

In 1994, Governor Mario Cuomo’s final budget authorized \$9.8 billion in school aid, less than \$20 billion in current dollars. Governor Pataki’s final budget in 2006 directed \$17.8 billion, or \$26 billion today. Even after the Global Financial Crisis, when school aid was trimmed on a real dollar basis in 2009, 2010, and 2011, New York’s spending never dipped below its 2005-06 level. Every school year since fall 2015 has seen New York school aid above \$30 billion in present dollars, even when Governor Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature in 2020 trimmed spending amid pandemic-related uncertainty about revenue. (Figure 1)



**FIGURE 1.** Source: Division of the Budget; uses DOB assumption of +3.9% CPI-U in CY 2023, +2.5% in 2024, and +2% in following years

### MORE SPENDING, FEWER KIDS

New York’s public school enrollment has [declined steadily](#) since SY 1999-2000, when it was more than 2.8 million, to fewer than 2.4 million in SY 2022-23.

The increased school aid and declining enrollment have combined to make New York’s K-12 per-pupil spending [the nation’s highest](#).

In school year 2019-20, the most recent year for which uniform 50-state data are available, New York’s elementary and secondary education spending totaled \$25,519 per student, 89 percent more than the national average.

New York spent 23 percent more than New Jersey (\$20,670), 36 percent more than Massachusetts (\$18,733), and 65 percent more than Maryland (\$15,489).

New York City’s public schools spent \$28,828 per student, the highest level among the nation’s 100 largest school systems. Chicago spent \$17,041 and Los Angeles spent \$16,355.

New Yorkers would be correct to ask: what are we getting for all this money?

## **SPENDING RISES, ACHIEVEMENT DOESN'T**

Student achievement data indicate New York's significant increase in school aid has not translated into results.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, has [not detected](#) a "significant increase" in New York student achievement, in either reading or math, across biennial testing periods since 2007 for Grade 8 or since 2013 for Grade 4.

Looking at the state's own assessments, more than half of students in grade 3 through 8 have scored below "proficient" in both English language arts (ELA) and math every year since [2011-12](#) (the last time more than half achieved proficiency in either). In the most [recent tests](#), only 46.6 percent of students were proficient in ELA and just 38.6 percent were proficient in math.

## **CHOICE IN ALBANY**

The last decade featured constant legislative and administrative battles over curriculum, teacher evaluations and standardized testing, among other things. In other cases, the Legislature has avoided tackling major problems, including structural issues in special education, civil service and collective bargaining rules that prevent superintendents from modernizing school operations, and forced participation in a costly and outdated pension system with volatile employer costs.

Short of undertaking what would be a grueling, multi-pronged (and overdue) overhaul of public education in New York, the path of least resistance in the short-term would be for the Legislature to make minor modifications to existing state programs that have delivered positive results.

Governor Hochul has proposed modifying the state's charter school law to allow more schools to open in New York City. Implementing these adjustments, unlike nearly any other change in education policy, would not require any new funding, bureaucracy or infrastructure, nor would it involve an unproven concept. A recent analysis found that SUNY-authorized charter schools across the state significantly [outperformed](#) their district school peers on state assessments in Math and ELA. Given the [high-need populations](#) charter schools serve in NYC in particular, they are one of the strongest forces at play in closing the persistent achievement gap.

Going forward, there is no rational basis for the state to cap the number of charter schools, and the Legislature should eliminate this arbitrary restriction.

Charter schools, individually, are public schools meeting local demand for alternative forms of public education. The charter-school system is a proven mechanism by which the Legislature can help provide taxpayers more bang for their education buck.

The effectiveness of charter schools as a state policy stems not only from the practices of individual charters schools but more so from harnessing the power of choice.

In most cases, the choice parents have over their student's education is limited by their ability to change their residence, pay for private school, or homeschool. The 1998 authorization of charter schools made choice available to families for whom the previous three options were out of reach. And with choice comes an accountability mechanism unlike anything that can be crafted in Albany.

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State policymakers should look for additional ways to maximize the choices parents have instead of the expenditures ostensibly made on their behalf. School choice programs have featured prominently in [education reforms across the country](#) and New York should identify and replicate best practices.

School choice programs are demonstrated by [national studies](#) to improve outcomes for all students, even those who remain in district public schools. They save money for [school districts and taxpayers](#), increase [parental satisfaction](#), and are [associated with academic gains](#) on the NAEP.