

## **City School District of Albany 2021-22 Legislative Priorities Support for Expanded Child Safety Zone Criteria**

Transportation is a critical tool for addressing chronic absenteeism, which is a leading indicator of low student performance in New York and nationwide. The current structure of the state's transportation law limits our ability to provide transportation for children who do not have a safe route to walk to school because the criteria for Child Safety Zones does not account for crime rates and the density of vacant buildings. Moreover, the state's current transportation regulations also do not fully align with current law, omitting criteria for a community's commercial and industrial properties from the point system used to consider new Child Safety Zones.

State law allows districts to create Child Safety Zones and provide bus service for students in those zones who would not otherwise be eligible for busing, and receive state reimbursement for those under-mileage students. However, the regulatory criteria to establish Child Safety Zones currently take into account only traffic and pedestrian safety conditions that are most commonly found in rural and suburban communities, such as high speed limits and lack of sidewalks. The New York State Senate has overwhelmingly approved legislation (S5719) that would update state law to include crime rates and the density of vacant buildings in the criteria for Child Safety Zones. The legislation is pending in the Assembly (A7242). We ask for your support in passing this legislation and adopting the necessary regulatory changes.

We also ask for your support in making sure current transportation regulations fully align with the law by adding criteria for the commercial and industrial character of an area.

While districts can choose to ask taxpayers to provide local funding for transporting students less than 1.5 miles without state reimbursement, residents and business owners in Albany already shoulder a heavy tax burden due to a variety of external factors, such as the high density of tax-exempt properties (more than 60%), the oversaturation of charter schools (more than \$35 million in state-mandated payments and services during the current school year) and a school-aid formula that provides our school district with only 45% of our annual funding (compared to school-funding levels in the 60%-80% percent in many other high-needs urban districts across Upstate New York).

We ask for your support in broadening the criteria for Child Safety Zones to include violent crime statistics and density of vacant buildings or structures, and for your assistance to modify the regulations so they also fully implement the existing law regarding commercial and industrial character of a neighborhood.

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### **VISION STATEMENT**

*The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.*

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*We will work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.*