



2025 *What a Year!*



New York State Association of Small City School Districts’ Year-End Review: A Year of *Impact, Innovation & Unified Advocacy!*

As 2025 comes to a close, the New York State Association of Small City School Districts (SCSD) celebrates a year marked by historic wins, strategic partnerships and stronger-than-ever advocacy for the 57 constitutionally designated small city districts we serve. Below is a recap of our collective work; the milestones, the progress and the momentum we will carry into 2026.

Strengthening Member Engagement: Launch of Discussion Boards (December 2025)

This year, SCSD finalized the launch of **online member-exclusive discussion boards** at www.smallcityschools.org.

These forums will allow superintendents and board members to:

- Share strategies and best practices;
- Compare policies, programs and district needs;
- Build collaborative momentum ahead of statewide decisions.

Activation links were rolled out on **December 3, 2025**. If your district is a member of the Association and you did not receive a membership link, please send an email to info@smallcityschools.org.

Calculation of Indebtedness Reform Signed Into Law: A Historic Victory (November 2025)

One of the most significant accomplishments for small city school districts occurred this year. Governor Kathy Hochul signed **Chapter 545 of 2025** into law on November 21, modernizing debt calculation and strengthening districts’ long-term financial capacity. This reform:

- Includes Anticipated Building Aid in debt calculations;
- Removes outdated shelter-related debt penalties;
- Provides immediate relief and expanded capacity for capital improvements;
- Establishes greater financial parity with districts statewide.

This landmark victory was achieved through persistent advocacy by small city school district leadership, member districts, and key legislative champions, **Senator Shelley B. Mayer and Assemblymember John T. McDonald III**.

Additionally, SCSD’s legislative and policy strategy has sustained momentum, building on the **2023 constitutional amendment** that triggered implementation of Chapter 596 of 2023. The statute raised the small city debt limit from **5% to 10%**, increasing districts’ capacity to plan and invest.

Food Security Framework Submitted to New York State Education Department (November 2025)

The Association created a **statewide model** for districts navigating food insecurity during federal SNAP/Medicaid disruptions.

NYSED requested the document for internal review and broader dissemination, a significant acknowledgment of SCSD's leadership beyond advocacy. Members can obtain the rubric by [clicking here](#).

Dr. Bruce Baker's Presentation (October 2025)

At the New York State School Boards Association Conference & Expo, **Dr. Bruce D. Baker**, one of the nation's foremost scholars in school finance equity, Professor of Education at the University of Miami, and a leading expert frequently cited by courts and policymakers nationwide, delivered a powerful, data-driven presentation at the SCSD Luncheon. His analysis exposed the long-standing irrationality of New York's Foundation Aid formula and highlighted the deep structural underfunding impacting small city districts. This session drew high superintendent and board member engagement and drove more traffic to our website than any other event this year. Members can [click here](#) to obtain his policy paper and presentation. Stay tuned for information on a virtual 'Pop-Up' session the Association will be conducting early next year.

SCSD Stakeholder Meetings With Commissioner Betty A. Rosa (Ongoing Monthly)

This school year marked another strong chapter of collaboration between SCSD and the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Our **monthly Stakeholder Meetings with Commissioner Betty A. Rosa and her senior leadership team** continue to be one of the Association's most strategic and high-impact member benefits. These meetings are not ceremonial touchpoints. They are **direct policy-influencing opportunities** that very few organizations in New York State have access to. They allow our districts to:

- Gain early insight into NYSED's evolving priorities, expectations, and regulatory timelines;
- Elevate the unique needs, challenges, and innovative practices of small city districts before statewide guidance is finalized;
- Ask targeted questions and seek clarification on issues affecting operations, finance, instruction, accountability, special education, and compliance;
- Strengthen trust and visibility between our Association and the Commissioner's Cabinet.

This level of proximity to state leadership is both strategic and rare, a privilege that we maximize.

From discussions on Foundation Aid, student supports, safety, accountability, data systems, early learning, and community schools, NYSED's willingness to collaborate with us this year demonstrates the power of showing up and contributing with clarity and purpose. The Stakeholder Meetings remain a cornerstone of our advocacy framework and a signature benefit of membership in the Association. They ensure that **small city districts not only have a seat at the table but a strong, respected voice in shaping statewide decisions.**

SCSD Leadership & Advocacy on Maisto Litigation (Ongoing)

SCSD continued its unwavering commitment to fair funding for small city districts. Advocacy included:

- Disseminating updates on the Remedy Phase appeal;
 - Sharing Bruce Baker and Stephen Uebbing's research on Foundation Aid deficiencies;
 - Engaging superintendents and boards in unified action. This remains a cornerstone priority heading into 2026.
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New York State Council of School Superintendent (NYSCOSS) Conference Partnership: Harvard University + Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet (October 2025)

SCSD proudly partnered with Harvard University's strategic education team and the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet at the **NYSCOSS Conference** where Rob Watson, Executive Director of EdRedesign and Lecturer on Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Dr. Eric Rosser, Superintendent, Rochester CSD, delivered a widely praised presentation on community-aligned student success and cradle-to-career frameworks. This collaboration showcased:

- The power of data-driven community partnerships;
- How small city districts can leverage national research to drive local outcomes;
- SCSD's growing influence as a thought leader in statewide policy and practice.

[Click here to view the presentation.](#)

News & Structured Updates: Keeping the Movement Informed (November 2025)

SCSD revitalized **The Voice Digest**, the Association's quarterly flagship publication, elevating it into a bold platform that captures the momentum, advocacy wins, and leadership shaping small city school districts statewide.

To ensure members stay informed between quarterly editions, the Association also launched **Tools, Tips, Takeaways & Tidbits**, timely, concise updates designed to deliver critical information, practical guidance, and emerging insights as developments unfold. Together, these publications keep members connected to the movement, informed of key shifts, equipped to lead with clarity & confidence because the fabulous work doesn't pause between issues!

Launch of the New SCSD Website & Social Media Platforms (October/November 2025)

SCSD proudly launched a **fully redesigned website and coordinated social media presence**, marking a major leap forward in communication, transparency and member support. Our new digital platforms were built with one purpose in mind: **to strengthen the voice, visibility, and connectedness of New York's 57 small city school districts**. The new website and social pages provide:

- A modern, centralized hub for resources, advocacy materials, research, legislation updates, and district tools
- Easier access to guidance, documents, and best practices

- Real-time updates on policy developments affecting small city students
- Dedicated members-only features, including discussion boards and governance resources
- A stronger external presence to amplify the needs and accomplishments of small city districts

For Members:

Superintendents and Board of Education members now receive:

- Priority access to resources and advocacy tools
- Exclusive entry to the new SCSD Discussion Boards (launched in December)
- Direct lines of communication with leadership, NYSED partners, and peers across the state

For Non-Members:

The new platform still offers:

- Public resources and updates
- Important event information and statewide announcements
- A clear pathway to membership for districts that want full access and representation

To view benefits of becoming a member, [click here](#). Districts wishing to join or reinstate membership can contact: **Elizabeth E. Biggerstaff**, Deputy Executive Director beb@biggerstaff-firm.com

Visual & Storytelling Highlights: “Schools in Action” (Ongoing)

The **Schools in Action** gallery on the Association’s website brings the work of small city school districts to life highlighting student achievement, classroom innovation, and the deep sense of pride that lives within our school communities.

These snapshots tell a powerful story of what happens every day across member districts: students thriving, educators leading with creativity, and schools serving as anchors for families and neighborhoods throughout New York State.

We encourage districts to share their moments of success: photos, videos, and highlights that reflect the impact of your work by sending them to info@smallcityschools.org. Together, we’ll continue lifting the story of small city schools and the students they serve.

SCSD Governance Retreat (August 2025)

Superintendents and Board of Education members convened for two powerful days of strategic leadership development at our annual Governance Retreat. This year’s retreat centered on:

- Strengthening superintendent–board governance partnerships;
- Deepening understanding of current NYSED policy priorities;
- Advancing equity-focused strategic planning;
- Enhancing fiscal and legal readiness for small city districts.

A highlight of the retreat was the extended leadership session led by **Senior Deputy Commissioner Jeff Matteson** of the New York State Education Department. His candid insights, forward-looking guidance and direct engagement with attendees provided clarity, focus and inspiration for the work ahead. Jeff’s

session was widely regarded as energizing and deeply impactful, offering district leaders practical strategies for navigating New York’s evolving educational landscape. His reflections helped anchor the retreat in purpose, collaboration and a shared commitment to advancing student outcomes in small city districts.

SCSD Annual Conference: Virtual (June 2025)

The Association’s Annual Conference brought together district leaders, state officials and thought partners for two days of learning, policy insight and district-to-district connection. Highlights included:

- Deep dives into Maisto litigation updates and Foundation Aid inequities;
 - Sessions on fiscal planning, enrollment trends and student mental health;
 - Opportunities to engage NYSED leadership directly.
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Closing Remarks: Momentum Into the New Year

As we close out 2025 and step into a new year, this moment invites both reflection and resolve. The progress made this year did not happen by chance, it was driven by intention, collaboration, and a shared commitment to advancing small city school districts across New York State.

This is a moment you won’t want to watch from the sidelines. Be part of the movement! We encourage district leaders to remain plugged into the Association by engaging with our website (www.smallcityschools.org), social platforms, member resources, and leadership networks. These touchpoints ensure alignment, strengthen advocacy and keep districts positioned for the work ahead.

As we turn the page to 2026, even more is ahead. Leadership is in the throes of kicking off a defining year for small city school districts with **bold advocacy, expanded influence and new opportunities** that are already in motion.

SCSD remains steadfast in its mission to **champion equity, elevate district voices and deliver results for students and families**. The foundation is solid. The momentum is real. And the work continues with **purpose, with unity, and with confidence**.