

NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

# ANNUAL REPORT



2025



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17

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12

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30

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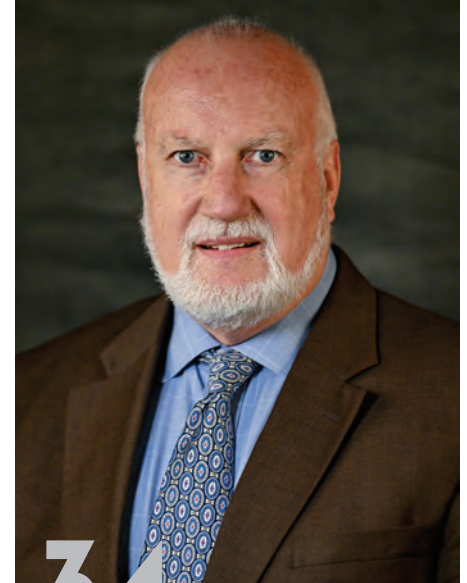
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56

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60

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58

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64

## HUMAN RESOURCES

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27

## OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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---



62

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# ADVANCING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE: A TRANSFORMATIVE YEAR FOR THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION POLICY

JEFFREY MATTESON, SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
LAURA GLASS, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

In the 2024–2025 school year, the Office of Education Policy (OEP) played a central role in shaping statewide educational outcomes through an expanded and strategically aligned portfolio. Under the stewardship of Senior Deputy Commissioner Jeffrey Matteson, OEP led initiatives that reached across the full P-20 continuum—from early childhood education to postsecondary pathways—ensuring every student in New York has the opportunity to thrive.

## ***Expanding Capacity to Meet a Broader Mission***

The Department's reorganization positioned OEP to become a more integrated force within the agency. A key structural shift occurred with the realignment of the Office of Special Education, which moved from P-12 Instructional Support to merge with Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES). This newly formed office now resides under OEP, allowing for a seamless continuum of support for students with disabilities through adulthood.

Further expanding OEP's scope, Cultural Education, the Finance Office, and the Office of Performance Improvement and Management Services (PIMS) were incorporated into the portfolio

following the retirement of the Executive Deputy Commissioner. This realignment has fostered unprecedented coherence between policy development, operational management, and program delivery.

"The expansion of OEP's scope has enabled us to bridge policy and practice across the full P-20 spectrum while managing the fiscal and operational heartbeat of the Department."

## ***Regionalization: A Bold Blueprint for Equity***

Guided by the principle that geography should never determine opportunity, OEP launched a bold statewide regionalization initiative to ensure equity, efficiency, and continuous improvement across all 37 Supervisory Districts. Through over 50 technical assistance meetings, the Department released the "Regionalization Planning Strengths & Needs Tool" and empowered districts to collaborate locally on shared solutions to persistent educational and operational challenges.

As of April 2025, 82% of component districts—totaling 557—had joined the effort. Over half of the regions achieved full participation. Interim reports already highlight extensive community engagement, signaling strong momentum

as districts prepare to submit finalized plans by October 2025.

"Regionalization is not consolidation; it's collaboration. It's about working smarter across boundaries to expand what's possible for students."

## ***Literacy Reimagined: The Path Forward***

OEP also took center stage in leading New York's efforts under The Path Forward, a national literacy initiative convened by the Hunt Institute. In partnership with stakeholders across CUNY, SUNY, and independent institutions, the Department developed an Action Plan to embed culturally responsive, evidence-based literacy instruction into educator preparation programs.

The release of the Science of Reading Framework and Baseline Reflection in May 2025 marked a major milestone. Institutions across the state are now assessing and improving their curricula to ensure they align with the science of reading. Additional activities include developing a statewide data dashboard, refining certification pathways, and supporting program redesign through public-private partnerships.

“We are creating a systemic shift in how literacy is taught—starting with how educators are prepared.”

### ***Strengthening Postsecondary Pathways: Dual Enrollment Reform***

Recognizing the critical role of early college experiences in student success, OEP championed a statewide dual enrollment policy—now codified in the FY26 Enacted Budget. With \$64.6 million in funding through the College in High School Opportunity Fund, the initiative aims to unify and expand access to dual enrollment programs statewide.

This initiative builds upon New York’s existing early college high school models, while incentivizing innovative partnerships that reflect local contexts. The new framework requires annual reporting, partnership agreements, and equity-focused funding allocations to ensure economically disadvantaged students benefit fully.

“Dual enrollment opens doors—for college access, for career preparation, and for accelerating success.”

### ***Aligning Research with Policy: The NYSED Learning Agenda***

With the launch of Research for Policy (R4P) in 2024, OEP began a new chapter in using data and evidence to shape the Department’s priorities. A cross-agency Steering Group, including a Regent representative, is developing the 2025–2029 NYSED Learning Agenda. The Agenda will catalog key questions, research strategies, and evidence needs across the Department.

The goal is not simply to collect data—but to use it to inform meaningful policy decisions, engage funders and researchers, and improve student outcomes through knowledge-driven innovation.

“Evidence must lead policy—not follow it. The Learning Agenda will ensure our work is grounded in what works.”

### ***Looking Ahead: Strategic Priorities for 2025–2026***

Looking ahead, the Office of Education Policy (OEP) is poised to build upon its significant accomplishments by deepening and expanding its efforts across several strategic domains.

The upcoming year will focus on solidifying implementation frameworks, advancing system-wide innovations, and ensuring that every initiative is aligned to the Department’s overarching vision of equity, excellence, and continuous improvement.

A key priority for the upcoming year is the continued implementation of the statewide regionalization initiative. OEP will support all 37 Supervisory Districts as they finalize their regionalization plans, which are due in October 2025. The Department will undertake a thorough review of these plans, providing constructive feedback and guidance to facilitate successful local and regional implementation.

Another significant focus will be the ongoing execution of the Path Forward Literacy Initiative, which continues to drive transformative change in how literacy is taught and supported statewide. OEP will analyze the responses submitted by educator preparation programs through the Baseline Reflection process, using these insights to establish a statewide baseline of literacy-related practices. This work will drive potential regulatory changes to educator preparation requirements, including literacy coursework and clinical experience components. In parallel, the Department will initiate revisions to certification examinations and develop a data dashboard that provides transparent insight into the placement and success of program completers within New York’s public schools. OEP also plans to explore the design of a state-level educator preparation program review process that complements the existing national accreditation cycle, further reinforcing accountability and continuous improvement.

With the statewide dual enrollment policy now formally codified in the FY26 Enacted Budget, OEP will

**“OUR LEARNING AGENDA PUTS RESEARCH AT THE HEART OF EVERY POLICY WE CRAFT AND EVERY CLASSROOM WE SUPPORT.”**

collaborate closely with the Governor's Office and a broad range of stakeholders to bring the vision to life. This will include developing a standard partnership agreement form, outlining data submission requirements for K-12 and higher education partners, and drafting the regulations that will govern the policy. The Department must release the partnership agreement form by January 1, 2026, with all agreements filed by September 1, 2026. In parallel, OEP will engage with institutions of higher education to create a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for collecting comprehensive data on student participation. Simultaneously, the office will write the request for proposals (RFP) for the College in High School Opportunity Fund, which will distribute funds to approved programs based on startup needs and the number of completed college credits by economically disadvantaged students—ensuring greater access and equity in early college experiences.



## **“EVERY REGION, EVERY STUDENT, EVERY ZIP CODE —OUR GOAL IS EXCELLENCE THAT REACHES ALL CORNERS OF NEW YORK.”**

The development and publication of the Department's Learning Agenda for 2025–2029 will mark a pivotal step forward in evidence-based policymaking. Spearheaded by the R4P Steering Group, this comprehensive roadmap will be finalized through iterative input, strategic analysis, and collaborative review. Once complete, the Learning Agenda will guide the Department's engagement with researchers, foundations, and other partners, while serving as a central tool to coordinate internal research efforts. The Agenda will be publicly available via a dedicated Research for Policy webpage, providing a transparent and coherent framework for aligning research activities with policy goals and decision-making processes.

Finally, OEP will lead the development of a forward-looking P-20 Policy Agenda in close collaboration with the Board of Regents and Department leadership. This framework will identify high-impact policy priority areas across the educational continuum, from early childhood through postsecondary and workforce pathways. The agenda will enhance cross-sector coherence and align resources toward initiatives that matter most to students and communities. Key efforts, such as the statewide dual enrollment policy and the “Portrait of a Graduate” initiative, will serve as anchor projects that exemplify the Department's commitment to fostering equitable access, rigorous learning, and real-world readiness for every student in New York State.



# ELEVATING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE: A YEAR OF PROGRESS AND PROMISE IN INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

ANGELIQUE JOHNSON-DINGLE, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

New York State continues to set the standard in public education through comprehensive initiatives that support multilingual learners, elevate instructional standards, and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. From rigorous academic frameworks to holistic student services, the P-12 Instructional Support Offices are advancing equity and opportunity through focused action, responsive leadership, and deep community engagement.

## ***Empowering Multilingual Learners: Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL)***

The Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) is dedicated to advancing a mission grounded in inclusive excellence. This mission is anchored in four core pillars: Standards and Instructional Support, Enforcement and Monitoring, Building Capacity, and Policy. OBEWL champions high-quality educational experiences for English Language Learners (ELLs).

During the 2024-2025 academic year, OBEWL convened the second annual "Voices United" conference, which assembled over 270 educators to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Lau v. Nichols. The conference underscored the importance of ELL civil rights and multilingualism through a series of keynote presentations, panel discussions, and workshops, which included sessions conducted by Dr. Ayanna Cooper.

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education and the Region 2 Comprehensive Center, OBEWL highlighted New York schools in national Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs and participated in a National Multilingualism Symposium in Washington, D.C.

The Comprehensive ELL Education Plan (CEEP) has undergone significant revisions to ensure compliance with C.R. 154 among school districts. New requirements mandate the submission of documentation related to ELL identification procedures, parental communications, and instructional schedules. To assist districts in fulfilling these requirements, OBEWL has provided a submission guide as well as an ELL Identification Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Checklist, aligning these updates with the recommendations from the 2023 State Comptroller's audit.

Through the Teacher Leadership Consortium (TLC), co-hosted with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), OBEWL has facilitated the professional development of over 500 ENL bilingual educators per session by disseminating best practices and updates that contribute toward fulfilling Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) credits.

In partnership with data teams, OBEWL has enhanced transparency by publishing comprehensive ELL graduation outcomes on the New York

State Education Department's (NYSED) public data portal, with disaggregated categories for Current, Ever, and Never ELLs.

Further accomplishments include the advancement of policy guidance for immigrant students, the allocation of \$1.1 million in funding for Indigenous language instruction, and the strengthening of the pipeline for ESOL/Bilingual educators through the Clinically Rich-Intensive Teacher Institutes.

## ***Championing Diversity and Belonging: Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

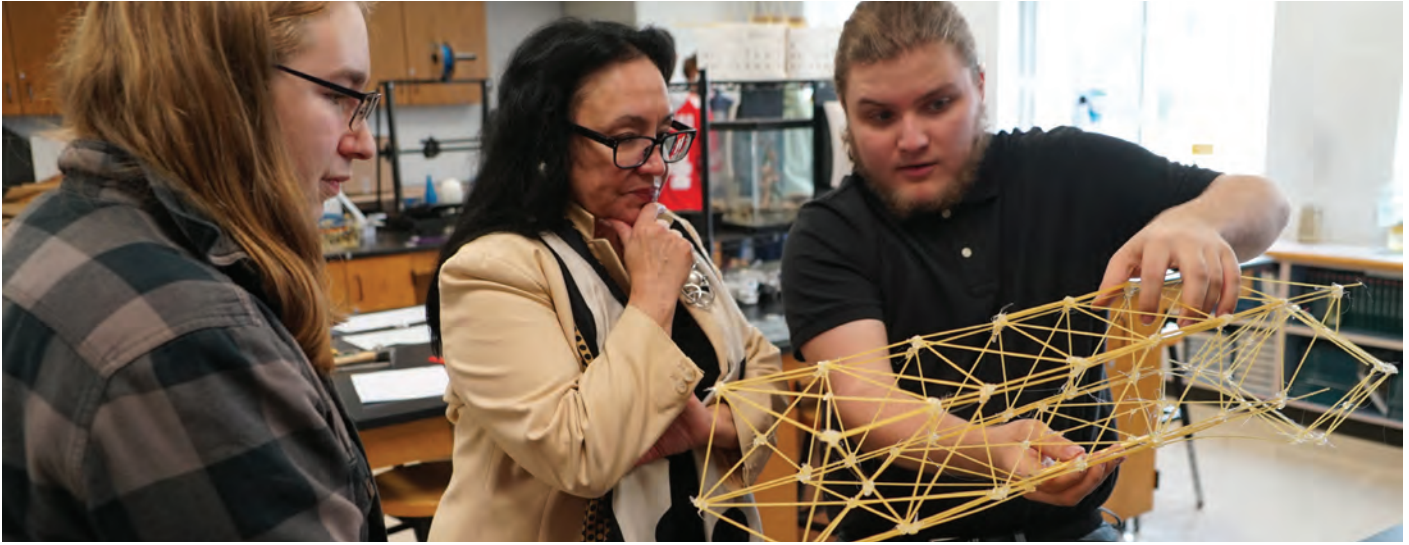
The Office of DEI remains a cornerstone in fostering inclusive school communities where all students thrive. "Equity work is community work. We create pathways where every student can succeed."

In 2024-2025, the Office convened a statewide "Uplifting All Students" conference that engaged over 1,000 educators through 40 regional hubs, focusing on promising equity strategies.

The DEI Leaders Network expanded to more than 600 members, creating a vibrant community focused on student voice, data equity, inclusive leadership, and community building.







A new Holocaust and Genocide Education Platform was launched in collaboration with the NYS Archives and the Holocaust and Human Rights Center. This platform provides interactive curriculum resources aligned with historical education standards.

The Office delivered more than 35 professional development sessions across the state and offered interoffice equity training within NYSED.

A newly developed online resource repository features tools and best practices collected from school districts and BOCES, facilitating shared learning across New York State.

### ***Advancing Academic Excellence: Standards and Instructional Programs***

The Office of Standards and Instruction champions student-centered excellence from civics and the arts to mathematics and digital learning.

“Instructional equity means all students see themselves in what they learn and how they learn.”

The Seal of Civic Readiness was awarded to over 25,000 students this year, representing an increase of more than

10,000 students compared to the previous year. A new digital manual supported this expansion.

The Office revised the Perkins V State Plan and delivered hands-on training in green technology to support Career and Technical Education (CTE) expansion. Enrollment in the Train and Sustain program—designed to help industry professionals become certified teachers—quadrupled.

The Numeracy Initiative advanced through the release of eight research-based briefs and the continuation of the annual Statewide Math Tournament.

More than 3,000 educators benefited from Learning Technology Grants, which provided professional development in blended learning, robotics, and STEAM education.

Looking ahead, the Office will prioritize strategic initiatives in climate and financial literacy, robust arts integration, and graduation measure reforms as part of the NY Inspires Plan.

### ***Comprehensive Student Well-being: Office of Student Support Services***

With an unwavering commitment to

health, safety, and student development, this office touches every facet of the student experience.

In 2024-2025, the Office partnered with New York State technical centers to deliver professional development on trauma-informed emergency drills, opioid prevention, inclusive wellness, and other health and safety topics.

The team administered over \$245 million in grants supporting afterschool programs, mental health services, and violence prevention efforts.

A Discipline Reform Toolkit was promoted to encourage restorative and social-emotional learning (SEL) based approaches to managing student behavior.

The Office also collaborated to update school safety drill regulations, enhance training for School Resource Officers (SROs), and participate in national safety and mental health summits. Additional initiatives included developing online hubs and resources in partnership with the Office of Mental Health to support tele-mental health and address chronic absenteeism.

In the upcoming year, the Office plans to roll out new grants for alternative discipline strategies, expand mental health

guidance, and implement policies to enhance the student-athlete experience.

### ***Nourishing Students for Success: Office of Child Nutrition***

A critical pillar of student readiness, this office has transformed meal access and food education statewide.

“Hunger should never stand in the way of learning.”

In the past year, the Office visited 436 sites, onboarded 18 new school food authorities, and supported universal meal legislation to ensure equitable access to nutrition.

The Farm to School program distributed \$11.8 million in federal funds, hosted a statewide summit, and launched culinary training initiatives for food service staff.

Innovative partnerships with the USDA and Cornell University enabled pilots for grab-and-go and home-delivered meal solutions, expanding accessibility and flexibility for families.

Looking forward, the Office will implement universal free school meals and introduce the “Rooted in Learning” agricultural education initiative.

### ***Building Early Learning Foundations: Office of Early Learning***

With oversight of over \$1 billion in Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) funding, this office supports New York’s youngest learners with research-driven programs and responsive technical assistance.

“Every strong learner starts with a strong foundation.”

During 2024-2025, the Office monitored 591 UPK sites across 640 school districts. It hosted the second

annual Navigating PreK Day and expanded its offerings of newsletters, toolkits, and accessible data resources.

The team also released new literacy tools and updated multilingual learner guidance to better support instructional strategies.

Future plans include streamlining UPK systems, advocating for increased per-pupil funding, and strengthening strategies for family engagement.

### ***Equity Through Access: Office of Access, Equity and Community Engagement Services***

The Office of Access, Equity, and Community Engagement plays a crucial role in advancing educational opportunities across the P-20 Continuum by strategically allocating funding to schools and institutions of higher education that promote college access, enhance teacher diversity, and provide critical support for underrepresented youth.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, the Office welcomed 14 new My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) Communities, increasing the total number to 50 MBK Communities. This expansion is

complemented by the launch of innovative student showcases and debate initiatives, specifically designed to elevate and amplify the voices of students, thereby fostering their engagement in important civic and educational topics.

The Office actively manages several programs, including Teachers of Tomorrow II (TOC II), Liberty Partnerships, and the MBK Indigenous Education Grant. These initiatives are integral to promoting educational equity and ensuring that all students have access to quality educational resources and opportunities that align with their unique needs.

Looking ahead, the Office is preparing to launch the New York State My Sister’s Keeper (MSK) initiative. This initiative represents a significant advancement in the Department’s commitment to fostering equity, leadership, and opportunities specifically for girls and young women of color.

Collectively, these programs exemplify New York State’s steadfast commitment to equity, innovation, and student success. Their cumulative impact ensures that every student, irrespective of background or geographic location, is equipped with the opportunities and support necessary to achieve their goals and thrive.









# DRIVING EDUCATION PROGRESS: THE POWER BEHIND P-12 OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

JASON HARMON, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

The Office of P-12 Operational Support is steadfastly committed to advancing educational excellence and equity across New York State. By providing essential resources, comprehensive support, and robust accountability mechanisms, the office diligently ensures every student has the opportunity to thrive academically and personally. Through strategic collaborations and proactive initiatives, the office enhances school and district capabilities, fosters continuous improvement, and ensures equitable resource distribution.

## **Office of Accountability**

The Office of Accountability (OA) is instrumental in promoting educational equity and establishing sustainable frameworks for continuous improvement. Through administering the accountability system aligned with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), OA engages closely with schools and districts, providing specialized resources and support tailored to their unique needs.

**Field Support Services** notably advanced educational practices by refining continuous improvement tools and launching the second year of the Supplemental Support initiative, significantly impacting 126 out of 151 identified schools. This program expanded

professional development opportunities, strengthening leadership capacities and enabling districts to conduct thorough assessments of resource allocation. By facilitating deep dialogues and targeted action planning, OA helped schools and districts direct resources effectively, ensuring equitable outcomes for all students.

Looking ahead, OA is committed to further enhancing these supports through a third year of differentiated programming, incorporating feedback and insights to optimize effectiveness. Additionally, OA will implement a tiered intervention model within the Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) framework, ensuring that interventions precisely match schools' varying needs. Internal monitoring of substantial school improvement grants will be reinforced to ensure compliance and maximize the impact of funding.

The **Policy, Analytics, and Research Team** made remarkable strides by strategically navigating the Accountability Rebuild Phase, refining accountability models informed by detailed data analyses. Achieving approval for substantial revisions to the New York State ESSA Plan marked a significant milestone, setting the stage for a more dynamic and responsive accountability framework. This revision aims to drive continuous

improvement by clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations within schools and districts.

Future priorities include refining accountability mechanisms further, seeking essential extensions for testing waivers, and conducting rigorous analyses of new English Language Proficiency assessments. OA will continue enhancing transparency and stakeholder understanding through targeted, accessible resources.

The **ESSA-Funded Programs Team** achieved remarkable progress by approving over \$1.8 billion in ESEA funding, significantly bolstering educational equity. The team developed extensive resources and tools for the new Stronger Connections Grant Program, facilitating schools' abilities to establish safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. Innovative initiatives like embedded video tutorials and rigorous review processes greatly enhanced application quality and accessibility.

Moving forward, amidst uncertainty in federal funding, the team will prioritize stability and adaptability. The launch of the first-ever NYSED Virtual ESSA Grants Training represents a proactive measure designed to ensure that LEAs have the skills, knowledge, and support necessary



to maintain compliance, administer programs effectively, and enhance community engagement.

### Office of Educational Management Services

Educational Management Services has significantly supported districts in navigating complex organizational changes and legislative requirements. A landmark accomplishment was overseeing the merger of Livingston Manor and Roscoe Central School Districts, now unified as the Rockland Central School District, representing a strategic consolidation aimed at maximizing resource efficiency and educational outcomes.

The office continued to adeptly guide districts through challenging transitions, such as meeting the mandate to convert school bus fleets to zero-emission vehicles by 2035. By facilitating over \$135 million in Smart Schools reimbursements and streamlining review processes, the office demonstrated exceptional responsiveness and efficiency.

In the coming year, the office will continue to support district and BOCES regionalization strategies actively. The team plans to further modernize administrative technologies and enhance collaborations on zero-emission vehicle transitions, ensuring districts

are well-equipped for future challenges and opportunities.

### Office of Facilities Planning

The Office of Facilities Planning ensured safe, compliant, and conducive educational environments by efficiently reviewing and approving permits for over 2,300 construction and renovation projects. Strategic hiring and the revitalization of the Third Party Review program drastically reduced project approval times, significantly benefiting districts statewide.

Implementing the Project Information Management System (PMIS) was a transformative achievement, transitioning the office from legacy systems to modern digital infrastructure, enhancing operational stability, efficiency, and communication.

Future priorities involve transitioning to fully digital project submissions, enhancing collaborative site visits to foster stronger partnerships, and advancing sustainability initiatives. These efforts align closely with state goals for climate-responsive education, ensuring facilities continue to evolve to meet contemporary educational and environmental standards.

### ***Office of Information Reporting Services***

As the central hub for educational data management, the Office of Information Reporting Services (IRS) effectively addressed expanding data reporting needs, supported key research projects, and significantly improved state educational data systems. Its meticulous management of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) initiative facilitated considerable advancements, including strengthened inter-agency cooperation and technical improvements.

Looking forward, IRS plans to expand its analytical capacity to address increasingly complex data needs effectively. Enhanced quality assurance processes, expanded data collections for Universal Pre-K and students with disabilities, and strategic partnerships in data governance will ensure continued excellence and reliability in educational data management.

### ***Office of Innovation and School Reform***

The Office of Innovation and School Reform significantly advanced support mechanisms for Receivership schools by enhancing data-driven decision-making capabilities and structured coaching models. The successful transition of four schools out of Receivership underscored the office's emphasis on sustainable improvement and leadership capacity building.

Future initiatives include developing comprehensive onboarding resources for incoming Receivership schools, refining strategic planning tools, and intensifying leadership and community engagement efforts. Additionally, adjustments to the State Monitor Program, guided by legislative changes, will reinforce equitable support and accountability across districts.

### ***Office of State Assessment***

The Office of State Assessment (OSA) played a pivotal role in modernizing educational assessments through a robust expansion of computer-based testing across grades 3-8 and introducing rigorously developed Regents Examinations. Additionally, OSA championed inclusive assessment practices for English language learners, incorporating comprehensive language support and innovative science assessment methodologies.

For the upcoming academic year, OSA is poised to complete statewide computer-based testing implementations and introduce additional standards-aligned Regents Examinations. Emphasizing continuous improvement and inclusivity, OSA will enhance assessments for English language learners and leverage legislative funding opportunities to streamline scoring processes, ultimately benefitting schools and districts across New York State.

Through consistent strategic efforts and targeted initiatives, the Office of P-12 Operational Support remains unwavering in its mission to promote educational excellence, equity, and innovation for every student in New York State.

**“WE’RE NOT JUST  
SUPPORTING  
SYSTEMS- WE’RE  
BUILDING A  
FOUNDATION  
FOR LIFELONG  
LEARNING, EQUITY,  
AND INNOVATION”**





# OSEA IN ACTION: ELEVATING EDUCATION AND CAREER PATHWAYS FOR NEW YORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

CEYLANE MEYERS-RUFF, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

The Office of Special Education and Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (OSEA) has made significant strides in 2024–2025, laying a strong foundation for a transformative year ahead. Through strategic collaboration, innovative programming, and data-informed policy updates, OSEA continues to empower individuals with disabilities across all life stages.

## ***Strengthening Special Education***

OSE's partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation is supporting students with disabilities transition seamlessly from education to adulthood. This alignment is already supporting thousands of young people as they prepare for life beyond high school.

In a move toward accountability and continuous improvement, OSE collaborated with the Office of Information and Reporting Services to revamp how school districts are evaluated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes assessing district performance based on compliance data, monitoring visits,

and audit findings. Districts identified as needing assistance now receive tiered interventions that include professional development, technical assistance, and ongoing monitoring.

Resource development took a leap forward as well. With support from the Contracts Unit, OSE executed agreements to expand special education resources through Technical Assistance Partnerships (TAPs) and embedded supports like Regional Partnership Centers and FACE (Family and Community Engagement) Centers.

Perhaps most notable is the launch of the Special Education Dispute Resolution Center (SEDRC), which is expanding access to mediation and conflict resolution statewide. Managed by the NYS Dispute Resolution Association, SEDRC offers training, centralized intake, cost reimbursement, and data reporting for special education mediations.

The MTSS-Integrated (MTSS-I) Center, housed at the University at Albany, supported 72 schools this year. Through pilot programs and a highly attended summit, the center emphasized behavioral

supports and literacy, reaching over 700 educators with evidence-based practices.

## ***Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025–2026***

In the coming year, OSEA will sharpen its focus on accountability under IDEA and finalize performance strategies tied to the 2020–2025 State Performance Plan. This work includes expanding the MTSS-I implementation, promoting inclusive preschool education, and addressing disproportionality in special education practices.

Collaboration with the Office of Early Learning and the Rate Setting Unit will further the goal of universal preschool inclusion. Through blended funding models and regulatory flexibility, these efforts aim to broaden access and improve educational equity.

## ***Empowering Adult Learners***

The Adult Education Programs and Policy (AEPP) team funded 315 programs that served 80,000 adult learners in 2024–2025. Quality improvement training reached over 300 program managers, and

statewide summits facilitated resource sharing and innovation.

Looking ahead, AEPP is preparing to launch a five-year Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program contract and host its first Apprenticeship Summit. Continued investment in teacher training and professional development will ensure ongoing progress.

### ***Raising the Bar in High School Equivalency***

The High School Equivalency (HSE) Office had a standout year. Staff responded to nearly 28,000 inquiries and launched a successful online platform for ordering diplomas and transcripts, which now handles 80% of requests.

Test access expanded, with 190 centers now offering computer-based testing (CBT) across New York. Policy changes to discourage no-shows and increase testing appointments are already improving outcomes.

For 2025–2026, priorities include managing peak testing periods, expanding digital document submissions, and refining alternative pathways like the Regents-HSE Exam and National External Diploma Program.

### ***Ensuring Quality in Proprietary Schools***

BPSS implemented a robust school renewal and licensing process, resulting in 61 license renewals and 35 new school approvals. Financial reviews and cross-unit controls have tightened oversight and improved school viability.

In the coming year, BPSS will focus on guiding schools toward financial health and updating regulations to reflect sector trends and student needs.

### ***Vocational Rehabilitation: Building Futures***

ACCES-VR formed a Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Implementation Team with OSE,

hosting summits to train vendors and staff in five key services—job exploration, self-advocacy, work readiness, post-secondary counseling, and work-based learning.

Policy updates have also made college and vocational training more accessible by lowering financial barriers and increasing funding caps. Meanwhile, the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) project is reaching hundreds of individuals, helping them transition into competitive roles.

Looking to 2025–2026, ACCES-VR will expand partnerships with community colleges, improve internal quality controls, and continue enhancing training and employment support statewide.

OSEA's mission is clear: to champion equity, expand opportunity, and elevate outcomes for individuals with disabilities in every corner of New York State. The work continues, and the future is bright.





# SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE ACROSS NEW YORK'S RELIGIOUS AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SUPPORT

GIOVANNI VIRGIGLIO, EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR

## *Meeting the Moment for Religious and Independent Schools*

Serving more than 1,800 state-recognized religious and independent schools across New York, the Office of Religious and Independent School Support (ORISS) plays a critical role in ensuring students in these learning environments receive equitable, high-quality support. With responsibilities ranging from regulatory oversight to resource development, ORISS is uniquely positioned to meet the evolving needs of nonpublic school communities.

In 2024–2025, ORISS continued to deliver targeted support through a two-pronged organizational structure: one unit dedicated to business and fiscal operations and the other focused on educational programming and school services. This approach allowed the Office to respond effectively to both financial complexities and instructional priorities.

## *Fiscal Leadership and Modernization*

With nearly \$350 million in funding administered during the fiscal year, the ORISS Fiscal Unit emerged as a model for

comprehensive grants management and responsive public service. Just one year after consolidating five reimbursement-based grants and four fiscal-support programs into a single, centralized operation, the Fiscal Unit undertook significant efforts to fortify its internal systems and improve its service delivery model.

“We knew the success of this merger depended on clear communication, reliable processes, and trust with our stakeholders,” noted Director Althea Johnson.

To ensure consistency and reliability across all nine fiscal programs, the team developed unified guidance documents, established robust internal controls, and crafted operational workflows designed to reduce duplication and increase transparency. This strategic foundation created a stronger platform for serving religious and independent schools more efficiently.

Recognizing that transformation also presents risk, the Fiscal Unit partnered with the NYS Division of Budget and NYSED’s Office of Information and Technology Services to audit system vulnerabilities and reinforce data integrity.



These evaluations are driving efforts to modernize tools, fortify cybersecurity protocols, and reduce administrative burden for school leaders.

## *Investing in Arts, Infrastructure, and Safety*

This year saw the successful launch of the Art & Music Teacher Salary (AMTS) Reimbursement Program, a new \$5 million initiative designed to support certified educators in the arts. This program not only provides much-needed salary support but also signals a broader commitment to enriching the educational experience for students through robust arts education.



Additionally, the Office inherited the administration of \$60 million in capital funding through the 4201 Schools Program, focused on infrastructure improvements at state-supported schools for students who are deaf or blind. In collaboration with the prior grant administrator, ORISS ensured a seamless transition of responsibilities—an effort that will continue into the next fiscal year.

Meanwhile, the Non-Public School Safety Equipment (NPSE) Program reached new heights. Having grown from \$4.5 million in 2013 to \$70 million in 2024, NPSE funding now covers critical health, safety, and facility repair needs. Newly expanded eligibility guidelines allow schools to apply for essential maintenance and safety-related renovations, improving the overall environment for students and staff.

### ***Clearing the Backlog and Looking Ahead***

One of the most pressing challenges addressed by the Fiscal Unit this year was the inherited 12–18-month backlog in grant review and payment processing. With the support of NYSED leadership, the team implemented overtime hours and process optimizations to make substantial progress. Yet, with projected appropriations exceeding \$400 million in the coming year—a 15–20% increase—the need for sustained attention and process improvement remains critical.









## ***Elevating Programmatic Support and School Services***

The ORISS Program Office continued to provide wide-ranging support across every phase of the school lifecycle—from new school startup and registration to compliance and ongoing professional development.

Their work reflects an unwavering commitment to technical guidance, regulatory clarity, and stakeholder partnership.

## ***Substantial Equivalency and Regulatory Guidance***

A major area of focus remained the implementation of Part 130 of the Commissioner's Regulations on Substantial Equivalency. The Program Team developed and disseminated a comprehensive FAQ document that answered more than 60 real-world questions submitted by schools and local authorities. This resource, alongside detailed implementation guidance, clarified the multiple pathways available for religious and independent schools to demonstrate equivalency and strengthened collaboration with Local School Authorities (LSAs).

To ensure transparency and compliance, ORISS provided LSAs with hands-on support and materials to complete an annual survey documenting the chosen equivalency pathways of all religious and independent schools within their jurisdictions.

## ***Operational Excellence in Support Services***

Throughout the year, the Program Office handled a wide array of administrative and oversight responsibilities:

- **High School Registration:** The team conducted desk audits and in-person site visits to expedite registration decisions for longstanding pending applicants.
- **Petitions and Incorporation:** ORISS facilitated the full lifecycle of school petitions, including charters, consents, amendments, and dissolutions.
- **Fire Inspection Compliance:** The team supported school compliance with fire safety inspections under Education Law §807-a, helping maintain safe learning environments.

## ***Capacity Building Through Professional Development***

The ORISS Program Office also played a leadership role in expanding access to high-quality professional development. It oversaw the RISE Conference, supported the work of three regional Professional Development Resource Centers (PDRCs), and facilitated multiple statewide training sessions tailored to the needs of religious and independent schools.

In coordination with the Fiscal Unit, the Office awarded a two-year, multi-million-dollar professional development contract, laying the groundwork for expanded training offerings across the state.

## ***Streamlining Communications and Stakeholder Engagement***

In an era of increasing demand for transparency and responsiveness, ORISS made notable improvements in public-facing communications and operational clarity. Key initiatives included:

- A redesigned website with updated content for schools and families.
- Improved response protocols for FOIL requests, complaints, and home school support.
- Strengthened collaboration with the Commissioner's Advisory Council and key stakeholders.

The Office also managed a growing number of ombudsman cases, ensuring that religious and independent schools received timely and equitable resolution to their concerns, particularly in their interactions with public school districts.

## ***Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025–2026***

As ORISS enters the next fiscal year, its focus remains on building a culture of efficiency, service, and staff empowerment. Plans are underway to digitize office files and streamline internal workflows, enhancing data accessibility while reducing physical storage needs.

A renewed emphasis on exceptional customer service will shape the Office's internal and external interactions—marked by courteous, informed, and solution-focused engagement. To sustain performance and prevent burnout, the Office is developing clear success metrics and focusing on equitable workload distribution.

Finally, ORISS remains committed to investing in staff development and well-being. Peer mentoring, recognition of individual achievements, and flexible work arrangements will continue to be prioritized as essential components of a thriving, high-impact team.

"Supporting over 1,800 schools isn't just about funding or regulation—it's about trust, responsiveness, and community," said Dr. Giovanni Virgiglio. "As we move forward, ORISS will continue to serve as a cornerstone of support for New York's diverse educational landscape."





# EMPOWERING THE FUTURE: INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IS REIMAGINING LEARNING FOR NATIVE YOUTH

DAVID FRANK, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

In the heart of New York State's education system, a quiet revolution is unfolding—one shaped by heritage, resilience, and a vision for equity. The Office of Indigenous Education (OIE) is on a mission to ensure that every Indigenous student across the state receives not only access to high-quality education, but one that affirms their culture, history, and identity.

From boosting mental health support to reshaping policies rooted in outdated practices, the 2024–2025 academic year was one of action and impact for the OIE. And with eyes on the future, the Office is poised to deepen its work and reach even more students in 2025–2026.

## ***Where Data Meets Identity***

For the OIE, equity begins with understanding. In 2024, the Office released its second annual Indigenous Student Data Report, offering a detailed look at how Indigenous students are faring compared to their non-Indigenous peers. These findings—covering enrollment,

graduation, and college readiness—weren't shelved or buried in bureaucracy. Instead, OIE staff hit the road, visiting districts and Tribal Nations to translate numbers into plans for real change.

Now, the data lens is widening. The Office has begun collecting even more nuanced indicators, including access to advanced coursework, post-secondary planning, Indigenous-centered programming, and staffing. The goal? A clearer picture of what education really looks like for Indigenous youth—and how to make it better.

## ***Health, Healing, and Hope***

Education doesn't exist in a vacuum, and OIE knows that. In 2024, it launched wellness-focused partnerships across multiple state agencies to support the full spectrum of student well-being. Through a collaboration with the NYS Office of Mental Health, the Office funded peer-led mental health programs in Indigenous communities. Simultaneously, a partnership with the Department of

Health tackled the sharp rise in youth vaping, while work with NYSEDA helped schools prepare for a cleaner, electric future—transitioning bus fleets in line with New York's 2027 zero-emissions mandate.

Together, these initiatives are helping students breathe easier, feel safer, and show up ready to learn.

## ***Leaders in the Making***

Civic readiness may sound like a buzzword—but for OIE, it's a gateway to empowerment. In 2024, the Office secured national grants to bring leadership training and service-learning to life.

One initiative funded youth-led service projects, giving students a chance to take action in their communities while earning the prestigious NYS Seal of Civic Readiness. Another built a sustainable service-learning model across several school districts, connecting academic goals to real-world change.

The message is clear: Indigenous students aren't just preparing for the future—they're shaping it.

### ***Beyond the Mascot: A Push for Respectful Representation***

Few issues have sparked as much debate as school mascots—and in 2024, OIE helped turn that tension into transformation. Working in tandem with the Indigenous Mascot Advisory Group, the Office guided schools through the sensitive but necessary process of retiring harmful Indigenous imagery.

The result? Nearly every affected school has made, or is making, the shift—choosing inclusive mascots and names that honor rather than appropriate.

### ***Reviving Culture, Rewriting Futures***

Cultural knowledge isn't a supplement—it's the foundation. That belief is central to OIE's work with the Commissioner's Advisory Council on Indigenous Education, which met at culturally sacred sites like the Onondaga Nation and Ganondagan State Historic Site. Topics on the table included building teacher pipelines for Indigenous language and culture, student wellness pilots, and cross-agency partnerships.

In the classroom, the Office partnered with the State Museum and NYSED teams to build professional

**CULTURE  
ISN'T AN  
ADD-ON...  
IT'S THE  
FOUNDATION**



development that embeds Indigenous history and culture into everyday teaching. It's more than curriculum—it's a reclamation of voice and narrative.

### ***A New Path to College—and Beyond***

One of the Office's most vital lifelines is the New York State Indian Aid Program, which helps Indigenous students afford college. In 2024–25, the program awarded 615 scholarships totaling nearly \$600,000. That's impressive in itself—but it's just the beginning.

The application process has gone fully digital, eligibility for graduate studies is being explored, and old regulations are being reviewed with an eye toward

inclusivity and modernization. The Office is also analyzing where students go to school, what they study, and how to ensure the road from classroom to career is smoother and more supportive.

### ***Funding the Future***

Behind the scenes, OIE manages a complex web of resources—more than \$70 million in funding last year alone. That includes tuition contracts with public school districts, operational funds for Indigenous schools, and transportation contracts to get students safely from sovereign lands to classrooms.

To make every dollar count, the Office is streamlining contracts, reducing red tape, and transitioning to fully digital records. It's government work, yes—but

done with an eye toward agility, efficiency, and respect.

### ***What's Next: The 2025–2026 Vision***

If 2024–25 was about momentum, the coming year is about expansion. OIE's priorities for 2025–2026 are ambitious but focused. The Office will continue spotlighting inequities through data and collaboration, pushing for broader eligibility in the Indian Aid Program, and ensuring campuses are equipped to support Indigenous students.

Internally, staff will engage in Indigenous education conferences to deepen their knowledge and responsiveness. Externally, the Office is leading a long-overdue rewrite of New York's 1975 Indigenous Education policy—an effort that includes creating instructional resources to help educators

across the board weave Indigenous perspectives into their teaching.

And civic engagement and wellness pilots? Those aren't going anywhere. The Office is actively seeking funding to scale these programs, recognizing their powerful role in nurturing student leaders and building school-community bridges.

### ***A Future Rooted in Identity and Possibility***

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, OIE's mission remains steadfast: to elevate Indigenous students, amplify their voices, and ensure their stories are not only heard—but centered.

**“WE DON'T  
JUST SERVE  
STUDENTS. WE  
SERVE NATIONS,  
HISTORIES,  
AND  
FUTURES.”**





# HIGHER EDUCATION: STRENGTHENING THE PIPELINE, SECURING THE FUTURE

WILLIAM MURPHY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

Bold reforms, powerful partnerships, and modernized systems have propelled New York's higher education landscape into a new era—one that's inclusive, resilient, and ready to meet tomorrow's challenges. With a renewed focus on accessibility, flexibility, and retention, these efforts reflect the Department's commitment to elevating the teaching profession.

Among the most significant developments was the registration of 149 residency programs across 29 institutions of higher education in New York. These programs offer structured, mentored experiences for graduate-level teacher candidates, enabling them to apply theory to practice while embedded in schools. The model has proven especially effective at building lasting connections between teacher candidates and the communities they serve.

Funding support came through the Empire State Teacher Residency Program, which awarded nearly \$30 million to 18 districts and BOCES in its first round. A second round followed, allocating more than \$21 million to 15 additional districts, charter schools, and private institutions. These targeted investments strengthen local education systems while diversifying and expanding the talent pipeline.

The Department has also introduced regulatory reforms that extended the validity period for educators seeking time extensions

or reissuance of initial or provisional certificates. These changes provide much-needed flexibility for candidates facing extenuating circumstances. Amendments were also made to allow teachers to earn additional certificates with fewer content-area credits, promoting quicker transitions into high-need subject areas.

The creation of a single professional administrator certificate—replacing separate School Building Leader (SBL) and School District Leader (SDL) certificates—simplifies the pathway for school leaders. By broadening eligibility criteria and allowing individual evaluation pathways, the new certificate empowers a more diverse group of future administrators to step into critical roles.

## ***Innovative Pipelines: Grow Your Own and Teaching Apprenticeships***

To further address the educator shortage, the Department invested heavily in Grow Your Own (GYO) initiatives—community-rooted programs that support candidates in becoming certified teachers while gaining experience in local schools. GYO efforts are instrumental in elevating individuals who already have strong community ties and a vested interest in their students' success.

These initiatives often begin with high school-level dual credit education courses and articulation agreements between K-12 systems and colleges. They continue

through flexible and innovative certification routes, such as multiple pathway options that accelerate the timeline to certification.

Simultaneously, New York's involvement in the National Registered Apprenticeship in Teaching Network demonstrates a commitment to scaling sustainable solutions nationwide. These apprenticeships provide paid, mentored pathways into both teaching and teaching assistant roles. Targeted support through the NYS Department of Labor, these programs allow candidates to earn while they learn, lowering financial barriers while elevating the quality of educator preparation.

## ***Modernizing Systems: Faster, Smarter, Better***

Significant advancements have been made in updating the state's teacher certification infrastructure. The implementation of Zendesk, a robust customer service platform, has revolutionized how the Office of Teaching Initiatives (OTI) manages inquiries and processes applications.

These digital upgrades are not cosmetic—they are critical to maintaining operational efficiency under rising demand. Processing timelines for certification have improved dramatically. In 2024, the Department processed 102,453 applications and approved 78,297—a significant throughput that reflects improved system capacity and responsiveness.

In tandem with technological investments, staff training and workflow enhancements have increased customer satisfaction and reduced wait times. These improvements allow the Department to better serve aspiring educators and uphold standards with efficiency and integrity.

“Efficiency isn’t just about speed—it’s about building trust and reducing stress for future educators.”

### ***Recruitment That Reflects New York***

The launch of TEACH New York (TeachNY.org) through a partnership with TEACH.org marked a bold step

forward in teacher recruitment. This dynamic platform serves as a one-stop shop for aspiring educators, offering personalized advising, curated content about the profession, financial aid resources, and connections to teacher preparation programs across the state.

What sets TeachNY.org apart is its user-centered design and emphasis on equity. The platform actively targets outreach to communities of color and rural communities that have historically been underrepresented in the teaching workforce. In its first year alone, the platform attracted tens of thousands of users, with a significant percentage identifying as people of color. These outcomes underscore the state’s goal

**“WE’RE CREATING  
HIGH-RETENTION  
PATHWAYS THAT  
OPEN DOORS  
FOR EDUCATORS  
AND CLOSE GAPS  
FOR STUDENTS”**



of building a teaching force that better reflects the diversity of New York's student population.

### ***Supporting Excellence: National Board and Mentorship Programs***

The Department expanded the Albert Shanker National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) Certification Grant Program to provide comprehensive funding not only for first-time certification but also for the Maintenance of Certification (MOC). For teachers seeking to renew their NBPTS credentials or retake a failed component, financial assistance ensures continued access to this prestigious certification.

National Board Certification remains a hallmark of excellence, requiring teachers to demonstrate proficiency in content knowledge, instructional differentiation, effective practice, and reflective learning. To date, over 2,300 teachers in New York State have achieved this honor.

Meanwhile, the NYS Mentor Teacher Internship Program provides structured mentorship opportunities for early-career teachers. Under the guidance of experienced mentors, interns receive real-time feedback, classroom support, and instructional modeling. Research consistently shows that new teachers who are mentored are more likely to remain in the profession and excel in student achievement metrics.

### ***Opportunity Programs: Equity in Action***

More than \$200 million in state funding has been allocated to a suite of programs designed to remove academic and financial barriers for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. These programs address multiple points along the educational pipeline—from middle school through college graduation.

The Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) prepare students from underrepresented backgrounds for college and careers in high-demand fields such as STEM and healthcare. The Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) focuses on dropout prevention, offering social-emotional learning supports, academic enrichment, and transition-to-college services.

Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) and Foster Youth College Success Initiative (FYCSI) are two standout initiatives that ensure students from underserved communities can afford and succeed in college. HEOP provides full-need financial packages, academic tutoring, and supportive services. FYCSI offers targeted financial support to students with foster care experience, covering not just tuition but also housing, transportation, and medical expenses.

As part of its My Brother's Keeper initiative, the purpose of Teacher Opportunity Corps II (TOC II) is to increase the rate of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged individuals in teaching careers. Since 2016, NYSED has awarded TOC II grants to 27 institutions of higher education with teacher preparation programs. The grants help institutions to bolster the retention of highly qualified individuals who value equity and reflect the diversity inside and outside of classrooms. Successful grantees incorporate proven strategies for teacher retention and best practice, such as mentors for new teachers and differentiated instructional techniques. In 2021-22, the Department awarded \$3.45 million in Teacher Opportunity Corps II (TOC II) grants to 17 New York colleges and universities. In 2023-24, the Department awarded roughly \$1 million dollars to seven colleges and universities to run TOC II projects for the five-year period of 2023-2028. TOC II projects supported 650 students in 2023-24. TOC II projects have graduated over 900 teachers to date.

The purpose of the Teachers of Tomorrow (TOT) program is to provide a variety of incentives that encourage prospective teachers to teach in a school district that is experiencing a teacher shortage or subject area shortage, especially in the big five City School Districts of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers. The TOT legislation offers specific incentives to help districts across the state to recruit and retain teachers. The annual appropriation is \$20 million dollars. During the 2023-2024 year, 26 districts participated in TOT supporting over three thousand teachers.

The Teachers of Tomorrow Science, Mathematics, Bilingual Education and English as New Language Tuition Reimbursement (TOTSMBE) program aims to assist school districts to attract qualified teachers who have received or will receive a transitional teaching certificate to teach in a low-performing school that is experiencing a shortage of teachers in science, mathematics, bilingual education, and/or English as a new language. The annual appropriation is \$5 million dollars. During the 23-24 year, 10 school districts participated in TOTSMBE supporting over 350 teachers.

**“OPPORTUNITY  
SHOULDN'T BE A  
PRIVILEGE—  
IT SHOULD BE  
POLICY.”**



## ***Making College More Affordable***

Affordability continues to be a pillar of New York's higher education strategy. The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), the state's largest financial aid initiative, now provides awards of up to \$5,665 for eligible full-time students. Eligibility was expanded to include families earning up to \$125,000 and to cover part-time students as well.

In a landmark step toward universal access, the FAFSA Completion Initiative requires every high school senior to either file a FAFSA or DREAM Act application, or submit a waiver. This measure not only increases awareness of financial aid but actively boosts college enrollment rates by empowering students and families with critical information.

## ***Access and Equity for Students with Disabilities***

In 2024–25, the Department dedicated \$4 million to expanding access and accommodations for students with disabilities at institutions across the SUNY, CUNY, and independent sectors. This funding supports a wide range of services, including:

- Enhanced accessibility and campus navigation tools;
- Summer transition programs to prepare students for college life;
- Professional development for faculty and staff;
- Investments in data systems for early identification and intervention.

These interventions ensure that all students, regardless of ability, have equitable access to postsecondary success.

## ***Program Oversight and College Closures***

The Office of College and University Evaluation (OCUE) has taken major steps to modernize and accelerate the program registration process. In 2024, the average time to register a program dropped to just 29 days, down from prior years. Of the 1,745 proposals received, more than 93% were registered within 60 days.

As more institutions face financial headwinds, OCUE also plays a critical role in managing college closures. Since 2016, 24 independent and proprietary institutions have closed. In response, OCUE provides support for student teach-outs, transcript preservation, and communications with accreditors and partner institutions.

## ***OSPRA: Meeting Demand for Safety and Accountability***

The Office of School Personnel Review and Accountability (OSPRA) remains essential to protecting student safety and

ensuring educator accountability. In 2024, OSPRA processed a record-setting 119,113 fingerprint clearances. The office also issued over 2,000 legal notices related to educator conduct, while managing thousands of moral character investigations.

To meet growing demand, OSPRA has advocated for additional legal and investigative staff. This is especially urgent given the increase in cases under the Child Victims Act and Adult Survivors Act, as well as new responsibilities related to test security and interim suspensions.

## ***Looking Ahead: Goals for 2025–26***

The Department has outlined a bold set of goals for the coming year, focused on data transparency, system modernization, and policy innovation.

The upcoming Teacher Workforce Data Dashboard will offer stakeholders unprecedented access to real-time data on teacher shortages, certification outcomes, and workforce mobility. This tool will support evidence-based decision-making for districts, policymakers, and institutions.

A complete overhaul of the TEACH certification system is in development, with an RFP expected in 2025. This platform will feature improved user interfaces, data tracking, and application workflows.

OCUE is continuing its modernization journey with a new digital college program registration system that streamlines communication, integrates Office of the Professions program registration processes, and reduces redundancies in proposal review.

Development of the next Statewide Plan for Higher Education is also underway. Informed by institutional master plans and robust stakeholder engagement, this plan will set the vision for postsecondary education in New York over the next decade.

The Department has also launched an Emergent Issues webpage that offers timely guidance on shifting federal policies, especially related to Title IX, DEI, and immigration. This digital hub will be continuously updated to help institutions stay informed and compliant.

Lastly, the Department is exploring changes to the Transitional Certificate, allowing for new, locally tailored pathways developed in collaboration with alternative providers. These changes aim to accelerate the preparation of educators in high-need areas.

## REGULATING EXCELLENCE:

## SAFEGUARDING PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY ACROSS NEW YORK STATE

DAVID HAMILTON, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER









In a state where over one million professionals serve in more than 50 regulated fields, the Office of the Professions (OP) stands as a national model of public protection and professional integrity. Since 1891, when medicine became the first licensed profession under the New York State Board of Regents, OP has ensured that New Yorkers are served by competent, ethical practitioners. In 2024–2025, that legacy deepened with new licenses, rigorous oversight, and continued modernization.

### ***Expanding the Scope: Licensure & Education***

This year, the Office of the Professions issued more than 94,000 new professional licenses, demonstrating the breadth of its regulatory responsibilities. In addition, the office processed over 350,000 license and registration renewals, ensuring that professionals across the state remained in good standing and up to date with their credentials. The team also handled over one million customer inquiries, underscoring the critical demand for information and guidance in the licensing process.

The Professional Education Program Review (PEPR) unit reviewed 438 professional education programs to ensure they met both general registration standards and specific licensure requirements, including curriculum content, internship hours, faculty qualifications, and support services. The Bureau of Comparative Education assessed documents from over 57,000 non-accredited programs, primarily for applicants educated outside New York. These reviews determined equivalency to New York's licensure standards and provided tailored guidance for remediation if deficiencies were found.

Working in close collaboration with these units, the Pre-Licensure Services team evaluated education and experience requirements for each of the 56 licensed professions. They ensured candidates met qualifications and, when applicable, authorized them to sit for licensing exams. Once requirements were fulfilled, applicants received an official license parchment and registration certificate. This information was also added to OP's publicly accessible Verification Search database, contributing to transparency and consumer protection.

### ***Oversight in Action: Investigations and Discipline***

The Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) led robust enforcement efforts. It opened 153 new illegal practice cases and conducted 4,685 disciplinary investigations to uphold professional standards. These investigations resulted in 554 disciplinary cases that culminated in formal action by the Board of Regents.

OPR also carried out 932 pharmacy inspections across the state, ensuring compliance with safety and legal standards. It issued 19 cease and desist orders and 26 administrative warnings. Additionally, the team facilitated 66 informal settlement conferences and 203 violations committee resolutions. These measures reflect OP's commitment to due process while safeguarding the public.

Meanwhile, the Professional Assistance Program (PAP), established in 1985, continued to provide critical support for professionals facing substance use issues. The program, which is supported by a registration surcharge paid by registered nurses, includes the



Statewide Peer Assistance for Nurses (SPAN) initiative. Together, they offer rehabilitation pathways that protect both patients and practitioners.

## ***Education, Engagement & Outreach***

OP's Professions Connections initiative expanded significantly updating and enhancing the Career Paths website to better guide students and job seekers toward the 56 licensed professions. It also participated in community and educational events, set up informational tabling at conferences, and created engaging social media content to boost awareness of licensure pathways. These efforts reflected OP's broader mission to foster professional opportunity and workforce development across the state.

## ***Legislative Leadership: Policy, Laws & Regulatory Change***

In the 2024–2025 reporting year, OP subject matter experts provided extensive technical assistance to legislators on bills affecting professional practice. Their insights were instrumental in the permanent adoption of 17 regulatory amendments.

Among the changes, new licensure standards were established for histotechnologists, a newly recognized clinical laboratory profession. Requirements were updated to allow pharmacists to dispense self-administered hormonal contraceptives and administer RSV immunizations. The state authorized registered nurses to administer emergency medical services and pregnancy tests based on non-patient-specific orders.

New standards also transitioned the title of physical therapist assistant from certification to licensure, aligning with national trends. Veterinary and nursing education programs saw regulatory alignment with national accrediting standards to address workforce shortages without compromising quality.

Additional updates revised examination policies in accountancy, expanded supervision methods for mental health practitioners and social workers, and formalized continuing education requirements in multiple fields. Each amendment aimed to strengthen regulatory integrity while ensuring New York's licensed professionals meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Whether it's new licensure laws or education regulations, we're helping shape a professional landscape that meets today's demands.

## ***Board Leadership & Collaboration***

In 2024, the Board of Regents appointed 64 new members to the State Boards and Committees for the Professions. These appointments supported 83 board meetings that took place throughout the year, where members provided strategic guidance, reviewed regulations, and helped shape licensure policies.

Each board brought unique contributions. For example, the State Board for Dentistry approved two pediatric specialty programs and a sedation certificate program in Kentucky. It also updated guidance on fluoride varnish applications, radiation shielding, and oral myofunctional therapy. The State Board for Medicine developed an online application for clinical clerkships and approved two new offshore training schools. The Board for Pharmacy collaborated with the Department of Health to authorize pharmacists to administer vaccines for Mpox and COVID-19.

Boards such as those for Geology, Interior Design, and Social Work engaged in statewide outreach events, helping students and early-career professionals understand the licensure process. Others, like the State Board for Psychology, advocated for fair licensing exams, while the State Boards for Occupational Therapy



and Optometry refined licensure forms and CE sponsor approvals. Across the board, collaboration with other agencies and professional organizations ensured alignment with public and workforce needs.

## ***Modernization & the Future***

Looking forward, the OP Modernization Program continues to develop a comprehensive, user-friendly system to manage every aspect of professional licensure. The updated platform will handle applications, renewals, corporate registrations, and complaints, with self-service features allowing users to check application status, submit materials online, and more. This initiative represents a major leap forward in making professional regulation more accessible and efficient for the public and practitioners alike.



# A YEAR OF DISCOVERY:

## INSIDE THE OFFICE OF CULTURAL EDUCATION'S TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY

MICHAEL MASTROIANNI  
INTERIM DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

New York's history is a story still being written. From the ancient geological forces that carved its landscape to the social movements that continue to shape its communities, our state offers a rich source of knowledge, creativity, and inspiration. The Office of Cultural Education (OCE)—comprising the New York State Museum, State Library, State Archives, Public Broadcasting, and the New York State Summer School of the Arts—exists to safeguard this story and invite every New Yorker to help write the next chapter. During 2024–2025, OCE reached deeper into communities, embraced transformative technologies, and renewed its commitment to public engagement.





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# INSPIRING CURIOSITY: HOW THE NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM IS EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION

## ***New York State Museum***

As the heart of the Office of Cultural Education's public-facing work, the New York State Museum brings the story of New York to life—past, present, and future. Through groundbreaking research, diverse collections, dynamic exhibitions, and inclusive educational programs, the Museum invites visitors, students, and scholars each year to explore the depth of our state. In 2024–2025, the Museum reaffirmed its role as a center for inquiry and inspiration, where science and history meet storytelling and every carefully curated object, program, and experience contributes to a shared understanding of who we are—and where we're going.

## ***Research & Collections Division***

The New York State Museum (NYSM)—the nation's oldest and largest state museum—continues to lead at the intersection of groundbreaking research and dynamic public engagement. In FY2024–2025, the Museum's Research and Collections (R&C) Division sustained its stewardship of over 12 million objects that collectively represent 1.3 billion years of New York's natural and cultural history.

This year alone, the Division added over 50,000 new acquisitions, ranging from mollusks harvested in the Hudson River to a mastodon jaw unearthed in Orange County.

Noteworthy additions include New York City minerals, fungi from Rensselaer County old-growth forests,

baseline genetic data for Hudson River shad and mussels, and Ice Age lithic tools from Oneida County. The collection also expanded to include insects and lichens from Albany County, plants from Schenectady County, and significant contributions to the Contemporary Native American Art Collection, featuring works from Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican, Shinnecock, Akwesasne Mohawk, and Seneca artists.

Scientific output remained robust, with NYSM researchers publishing 36 peer-reviewed articles across disciplines including archaeology, biology, ethnology, geology, and paleontology. Additionally, the team produced four geological technical monographs and 36 detailed geologic quadrangle maps covering over 14,000 square miles. The Division secured more than \$1.4 million in competitive funding from federal agencies and private foundations, supporting initiatives such as postdoctoral fellowships, indigenous consultations, and enhanced collections care.

The Cultural Resources Survey Program (CRSP) conducted 18 compliance projects across as many counties, resulting in ten archaeological and eight architectural technical reports. A highlight of the year was the excavation at the Genesee Overlook Site in Livingston County, which yielded thousands of pre-contact Indigenous artifacts dating back 6,000 years.

In addition to research and collections development, R&C staff

responded to nearly 2,000 scientific inquiries and engaged more than 1,900 individuals through outreach programming between November 2024 and March 2025—complementing the Museum's ongoing "Explorations with Experts" public series.

## ***History Office***

The New York State Museum's History Office plays a vital role in interpreting, preserving, and sharing the stories that define New York's diverse past and evolving identity. Through exhibitions, publications, acquisitions, and public history initiatives, the History Office bridges scholarly inquiry with public understanding, ensuring the state's complex heritage remains accessible, inclusive, and relevant.

## ***Scholarly and Creative Works***

This past year witnessed an exceptional range of scholarly and creative output from the History Office. Ashley Hopkins-Benton explored civil rights history in her article "LGBTQ+ Politics and Organizing: The Fight for Legal Protections in Albany, New York" (*The Hudson River Valley Review*, Autumn 2024). Karen Quinn, in collaboration with Jennifer Lemak, authored *Margery Ryerson: Art is Contagious* (NYSM Circular 73, April 2025), while also publishing *The Historic Woodstock Art Colony: Arthur A. Anderson Collection* (SUNY Press, June 2024).

Devin Lander contributed “Revolutionary New York” to *New York By Rail* (April 2025) and co-authored, with Paige Rozanski, “The Communication of Experience is Art: USCO, the Castalia Foundation, and Psychedelic Art in the Hudson Valley” for *The Hudson River Valley Review* (Autumn 2024). Additionally, Lemak, Lander, and Aaron Noble co-edited two new volumes of *New York History* (Cornell University Press, Summer 2024/Winter 2024–2025).

The History Office also extended its reach through media collaborations: WMHT’s *North to New York: The Great Migration in NY’s Capital Region* was inspired by Lemak’s research and book *Southern Life, Northern City*, and Lander continued to serve as host and lead researcher for *A New York Minute in History*, releasing 11 new podcast episodes with WAMC.

### ***Collections and Acquisitions***

The Museum’s history collections grew significantly through acquisitions that deepen and diversify our understanding of New York’s cultural and social landscape. Highlights include artifacts from Amityville documenting commercial duck hunting and jewelry making, and materials from a 19th- and early 20th-century inventor. The Russ Oechsle clock collection—featuring more than 80 timepieces from across the state—was also added.

Significant archival collections documenting women’s rights and LGBTQ+ organizing in Albany from 1970 to 2015 were acquired, along with poignant personal items such as the Mount Sumat medal awarded to World War II nurse and POW Eunice F. Young, letters and memorabilia from Brooklyn-based African American WWII veterans, and personal

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RESEARCHER,  
AND VISITOR  
WE SERVE.”**

effects of a New York soldier from World War I. Notable contemporary works include *Ginger Jar* by Vivian Chiu and *Togetherness Tray* by Tiffany Saw.

### ***Awards and Recognition***

In recognition of their outstanding contributions to historical scholarship and public history, Jennifer Lemak and Ashley Hopkins-Benton received the 2024 Moving History Forward Award from Monumental Women. State Historian Devin Lander was honored with the Registered Historian Award by the Association of Public Historians of New York State (APHNYS), underscoring his commitment to preserving and interpreting the state’s rich historical legacy.





## ***Museum Education, Public Programming, and Visitor Services***

At the heart of the New York State Museum's mission is its ability to connect people with knowledge through meaningful, inclusive, and accessible experiences. Whether through school visits, educator development, public events, or daily visitor support, the Museum's Public Programming and Visitor Services teams ensure that learning, discovery, and community-building happen every day. This year marked a period of ambitious expansion with new partnerships, expanded digital offerings, and record-setting participation across audiences.

### ***Museum Education***

The Museum welcomed hundreds of school groups, engaging tens of thousands of students in learning experiences designed to spark curiosity and deepen understanding. Whether through self-guided visits, educator-led tours, or interactive virtual programs, students explored the Museum's collections and exhibitions in ways that connected classroom learning to real-world discovery.

In tandem with student engagement, the Museum expanded its support for educators across the state. Over 1,400 teachers—representing every region of New York—participated in the Museum's CTLE-accredited professional development programs. These offerings included nearly 20 new asynchronous virtual courses and a growing number of content-rich workshops developed in collaboration with Museum scientists, ensuring alignment with New York State Learning Standards, increasing accessibility for busy educators, and bringing the Museum's expertise to teachers regardless of where they are located.

This educator-focused work was

further amplified through ongoing collaboration with the State Education Department. The Museum played an active role in statewide initiatives such as the Seal of Civic Readiness, Science Everywhere, Cultural Connections, and the development of Earth & Space Science reference resources—helping bring high-quality educational content to classrooms across New York.

Strategic partnerships also continued to expand the Museum's reach and impact. Through a collaboration with the Smithsonian's Museums on Main Street program and the Museum Association of New York, the NYSM supported the statewide launch of Voices and Votes—a civically focused travelling exhibition that brought the story of democracy to communities across the state.

The Museum continued to champion student achievement through programs that celebrate learning beyond the classroom. Events such as the Capital District History Day Competition and the Battle of the Books brought students together in friendly, intellectually engaging tournaments. These events were hosted and supported by the Museum through staffing, programming, and access to Museum spaces—offering young participants an opportunity to showcase their skills, collaborate with peers, and connect with the broader educational community.

### ***Public Programming***

Public programming at the New York State Museum surged in 2024–2025, driven by a bold vision to engage broader, more diverse audiences through innovative, inclusive experiences. Led by the Museum Education Office and in close collaboration with colleagues across the Office of Cultural Education (OCE), the Museum launched an energized lineup of weekday programming designed to inspire visitors of all ages.

These daily offerings showcased the

full spectrum of OCE's expertise, providing hands-on learning and meaningful engagement for families, school groups, and lifelong learners. Highlights included Storytime Adventures with the New York State Library, Investigation Stations with the New York State Archives, Special Screenings in partnership with PBS, and behind-the-scenes tours and talks with NYSM scientists, historians, and cultural experts.

The return of large-scale family events brought renewed vitality to the Museum. Community favorites such as Women of Science, Family History Day, Rock and Fossil Fun Fair, and Spooktacular drew large and enthusiastic crowds. A dynamic partnership with PBS affiliate WMHT added a new layer of excitement, blending the Museum's research and collections with iconic children's programming like Dinosaur Train, Carl the Collector, and Happy Birthday, Sesame Street.

At the heart of this programming was a deep commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Collaborations with organizations such as Bring on the Spectrum (BOTS) and Eureka! Girls Inc. ensured that all programs were thoughtfully designed to reflect the needs of diverse audiences. These efforts not only expanded access but reimaged what welcoming, inclusive cultural spaces can look like.

To meet growing demand for flexible learning, the Museum expanded its digital footprint with a robust library of asynchronous virtual programs. These professionally produced, on-demand resources continue to serve educators, families, and independent learners statewide—offering rich content with anytime accessibility.

The Museum also extended its reach into the community with Science Café and History and Hops, two popular series that brought NYSM experts into local venues. These informal, engaging

events transformed restaurants and public spaces into hubs of conversation, where visitors connected with cutting-edge research in a relaxed, social atmosphere.

Together, these efforts reflect the Museum's evolving role as a cultural catalyst—bridging disciplines, communities, and generations. With each program, the Museum reaffirms its mission to inspire curiosity, foster connection, and make learning accessible to all.

### ***Visitor Services***

As the first and last point of contact for many guests, the Museum's Visitor Services Staff (VSS) serve as the front line of hospitality and engagement at the New York State Museum. Whether welcoming school groups, families, or first-time visitors, their work ensures each experience is warm, informative, and seamless.

From greeting guests at the front desk to operating the beloved New York State Carousel, VSS plays an essential role in nearly all aspects of the Museum's public operations. Their responsibilities go well beyond the lobby—they lead family-friendly programs and staff interactive Exploration Stations that bring exhibits to life for visitors of all ages.

This year, VSS also served hundreds through guided tours of the historic State Education Building, connecting audiences to the broader legacy of the Department. They supported tens of thousands of students on school field trips by providing group orientations, organizing special Carousel rides, and staffing student support stations to ensure a smooth, engaging visit.

The Museum's historic carousel, built in 1914, continued to be a major attraction, drawing over 60,000 riders this year—a significant increase from the previous year—reflecting its enduring popularity and the care with which VSS manages it.

### ***After School Programming & Youth Services***

The New York State Museum's After School Program is a dynamic, student-centered initiative that supports academic success while fostering curiosity, confidence, and community connection. Open every school day, the program provides a consistent, welcoming environment where students receive targeted academic support and enrichment.

With a strong emphasis on English Language Arts and reading, participants benefit from personalized homework assistance and educational guidance. Museum Instructors and Visitor Services Staff lead engaging, mission-driven activities that introduce students to the Museum's collections, research, and learning resources—helping them feel at home in a cultural and educational setting.

The program takes a holistic approach to student development, combining academic reinforcement with meaningful opportunities for exploration, creativity, and growth. Over time, it has demonstrated measurable success in supporting students' academic achievements and personal development.

Beyond the school year, the After School Program plays an active role in the City of Albany's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and hosts volunteers from local colleges. Each summer, SYEP participants engage in a five-week, hands-on experience that exposes students to career paths within the Museum and the Office of Cultural Education (OCE). These students collaborate with professionals, explore collections, and help create public programming that reflects their interests and learning.

Through academic support and immersive summer experiences, the NYSM's After School Program continues to make a meaningful impact—nurturing the next generation of learners, leaders, and lifelong museum-goers.

### ***Exhibits Department***

The Exhibits Department experienced a renewed wave of momentum in 2024–2025, marked by fresh creative energy, strategic collaboration, and an expanded vision for public engagement. The team took numerous steps to improve how exhibitions serve the public—balancing curatorial goals with a more responsive,

**“WE’RE NOT JUST  
COLLECTING ARTIFACTS.  
WE’RE COLLECTING  
EXPERIENCES THAT  
MATTER TO PEOPLE  
TODAY”**





visitor-centered approach. From launching major new displays to revitalizing core gallery spaces and embracing immersive media, staff delivered impactful experiences that reflect the Museum's evolving role as a modern, inclusive, and future-facing institution.

The exhibition calendar featured a varied blend of cultural, historical, and artistic themes. *Canine Contrasts*, which opened in June 2024, explored the differences between wolves and coyotes. In partnership with OGS Curatorial, staff presented rare Dutch artifacts in conjunction with the Dutch royal visit in summer 2024. September marked the debut of *Sadako's Crane*, a moving tribute to peace and resilience, alongside the launch of the New York State Museum Earthquake Center—an immersive, science-based experience.

In November, two powerful exhibitions opened: *Margery Ryerson: Art is Contagious*, which celebrated the work of a pioneering 20th-century artist and educator, and *Little Brown Jug*, a ceramics exhibition featuring contemporary works crafted with historic Albany Slip clay. December saw the permanent installation of *Fear Not, We Come* in the Fire Engine Hall—the first enhancement to this space since 1976.

January 2025 ushered in additional highlights, including a refreshed Tuck High exhibit featuring a Lunar New Year component and the unveiling of *The Power of Homestead*, which honored the history of the largest African American-owned farm in the Albany area. Looking ahead, *Outcasts: Mary Banning's World of Mushrooms* and the traveling exhibition *Enterprising Waters: New York's Erie Canal* are scheduled to open in March 2025.

Gallery upkeep and environmental enhancements remained a critical focus throughout the year. In addition to the Tuck High refresh and Lunar New Year installation, a new mural celebrating the Cohoes Mastodon was completed in January 2025. The Ice Ages gallery received updated paint and interpretive panel enhancements, while design work progressed for a comprehensive lobby refresh.

Looking back toward fall 2024, the installation of a large-scale, photo mural and accompanying immigration-themed video was planned, aligning with broader institutional goals to present inclusive, timely narratives across exhibition spaces.

Video production expanded significantly in both volume and scope, supporting a wide range of initiatives—from in-gallery storytelling to statewide education. Content was developed for public programming, professional development (CTLE), digital marketing, and exhibition support. Notable projects included media for the My Brother's Keeper initiative, behind-the-scenes features, and outreach materials for the Board of Regents.

Social media strategy was strengthened through the introduction of curated monthly themes, including Pride Month (June 2024), Hispanic Heritage Month (September-October 2024), History Month (October 2024), Native American Heritage Month (November 2024), Black History Month (February 2025), and Women's History Month (March 2025). The launch of daily post programming in February 2025 significantly increased digital engagement and amplified the Museum's voice across platforms.



# WRITING NEW YORK'S NEXT CHAPTER: EDUCATION, HISTORY, AND INNOVATION

LAUREN MOORE  
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, NYS LIBRARY

BRIAN KEOUGH  
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, NYS ARCHIVES

## *New York State Library*

At the heart of the New York State Education Department's mission to foster equity and lifelong learning, the New York State Library (NYSL) continues to lead statewide efforts that expand access to information, technology, and educational opportunity. Through innovative partnerships, groundbreaking digital equity initiatives, infrastructure investments, and expert-driven public service, the State Library empowers libraries and communities across New York. In 2024–2025, the Library advanced key programs that support early literacy, accessible technologies, professional development, and resource sharing—ensuring that every New Yorker, regardless of background or ability, has the tools to thrive in the information age.

The State Library spearheaded several major initiatives to promote digital equity across New York. In collaboration with ConnectALL (New York State's Broadband Office), the Empire State Library Network (ESLN), and the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL), the Library led a statewide project focused on technology, accessibility, and public libraries. NYSL administered the data collection phase of the project while

NYAIL conducted in-person accessibility audits and developed a self-assessment tool to help libraries evaluate and improve their accessible technology offerings. Ultimately, NYSL supported libraries in implementing these assessments, the results of which will inform future funding strategies.

To guide this work, the Library convened an advisory committee composed of library professionals, disability advocates, service organizations, and individuals with disabilities—ensuring that the voices of those most impacted helped shape project outcomes. In tandem, the State Library launched the Digital Equity Academy, an initiative that equips library workers in small and rural communities with the tools and training to become digital equity champions in their regions.

Building on its long-standing leadership in early learning, the State Library continued its Ready to Read at New York Libraries initiative, which supports the delivery of high-quality early literacy services statewide. A train-the-trainer model builds staff capacity and ensures that families and caregivers have the resources they need to prepare young children for school success. The program

reaches communities across the state through New York's 1,000 public library outlets.

To support library infrastructure, the Division of Library Development administered \$34 million through the State Aid for Public Library Construction program, funding 207 projects across the state. The Division also began awarding \$500,000 in competitive grants for participation in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program that provides free books to young children and supports early literacy development.

In 2024, the State Library secured continued funding for NOVELny, its statewide database initiative that offers free access to high-quality digital resources from Gale and Britannica Digital Learning. The expanded database offerings reflect input from libraries across New York and meet growing demand for resources that support education, workforce development, research, and lifelong learning.

In the field, Library Development staff delivered professional training to more than 800 library workers on topics including public library standards, NOVELny statewide databases, diversity



and inclusion, the Performers and Programs Database, and construction aid.

At the Regent Joseph E. Bowman Jr. Research Library, staff worked to build a more efficient and equitable interlibrary loan system in partnership with libraries across the country. Using ISO 18626—the new interlibrary loan standard—this initiative aims to enhance collaboration and resource sharing nationwide. The Library's Preservation Unit contributed to a major grant application to digitize historic newspaper microfilm and welcomed The Smithtown Library as the newest selective depository in the Federal Depository Library Program, expanding public access to government information.

The Research Library hosted 84 public programs—over half presented virtually—to reach a statewide audience with high-quality educational content. Librarians responded to more than 5,000 research inquiries on legal, historical, genealogical, and educational topics, serving a wide range of users including students, teachers, attorneys, government employees, and historians.

The Talking Book and Braille Library (TBBL) served over 11,100 patrons and institutions, offering vital reading services to individuals with print disabilities. A newly installed audio recording studio allows the library to produce recordings of locally significant materials, which will be shared nationally in partnership with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS). TBBL also launched an outreach campaign to improve engagement and retention and implemented new NLS policies to support young users and expand access to audio magazines. The library currently serves an average of 125 patrons weekly.

### **New York State Archives**

As the steward of New York's documentary heritage, the New York State Archives plays a vital role in preserving the records that define the state's history,

support government accountability, and inform public understanding. From colonial-era manuscripts to 21st-century digital data, the Archives safeguards more than 270 million records—paper, photographic, electronic, and audiovisual—spanning over 200,000 cubic feet. Through its leadership in archival access, digital preservation, and records management, the State Archives ensures that government records are not only protected but meaningfully accessible to researchers, agencies, and communities across the state.

Established by law in 1971 and fully operational as a research institution by 1978, the New York State Archives identifies, preserves, and provides access to the permanent records of New York State government. These records are essential for documenting the state's political, social, and cultural history, supporting government transparency, and enabling research. The Archives holds materials from all three branches of government, reflecting nearly every era and function of New York history—from the 1600s to the present day.

The Archival Services team oversees the acquisition, description, storage, and conservation of these records and ensures public access to them. In 2024, more than 1,000 researchers visited the Archives' Research Room. Staff responded to over 7,500 email requests, retrieved nearly 8,000 boxes from storage, and fulfilled 481 digitization requests, resulting in over 86,000 scanned pages provided to patrons. The Archives also added significant new materials to its holdings: 1,100 cubic feet of paper records, 4,800 rolls of microfilm, 125,000 cubic feet of microfiche, and more than 1.25 TB-digital records.

The Digital Records staff lead efforts in electronic records preservation and access, managing the systems used to ingest, organize, and maintain digital content. The Archives website remains a critical gateway to this information,

offering access to more than 6,500 finding aids, 63,000 digitized documents, and 50 searchable name indexes covering over 400,000 individuals. In 2024, the website was viewed over 1.25 million times, underscoring its value as a resource for researchers, educators, and the general public.

Beyond preservation, the Archives supports efficient records management for both state and local governments. Services include records retention and disposition scheduling, advisory support, and training for over 80 state agencies and 4/500 local governments. In 2025, State Archives staff made over 6,500 consultations with state agencies and local governments and delivered more than 40 training sessions, reaching 2,200 participants.

The State Records Center, operated by the Archives, houses approximately 250,000 cubic feet of inactive records—providing secure, cost-effective storage and retrieval services for state agencies and administers the State Wastepaper Recycling Contract. This past year, the Records Center took in 7/764 new boxes of records and processed 5,347 retrieval requests.



**Brian Keough**  
Assistant Commissioner  
NYS Archives

The Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) continues to be a cornerstone of the Archives' support for local governments. Each year, the LGRMIF program provides approximately \$6 million in competitive grants to help around 100 local governments improve records management practices.

### ***Archives Partnership Trust***

The Archives Partnership Trust, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1992, plays a critical role in advancing the mission of the New York State Archives. Established to build an endowment and provide vital project support, the Trust enhances humanities programming, expands public access to New York's historical treasures, and helps ensure the long-term preservation of the state's archival records. Since its inception, the Trust has supported an impressive array of initiatives, including the Larry J. Hackman Research Residency Program, the Student Research Awards, statewide history conferences, exhibitions, book signings, teacher training institutes, public lectures, and major preservation projects. Through these efforts, the Trust safeguards New York's rich historical legacy and makes it accessible to scholars, students, and the public for generations to come.

A cornerstone of the Trust's outreach is *New York Archives* magazine, a publication with a readership of over 20,000. In 2024, the Trust expanded its reach to younger audiences with the launch of *New York Archives Jr!*, an engaging edition tailored for students that has already been adopted by more than 550 school districts and 59 counties across the state.

The Trust also operates ConsiderTheSourceNY.org, a free online resource that connects educators with thousands of digitized primary sources from across New York—including documents housed in churches,



museums, historical societies, libraries, and government archives. The site offers highly engaging, standards-based learning activities that bring history into classrooms and communities.

In 2024, the platform saw substantial growth: it now hosts over 4,300 primary sources, 1,800 learning activities, and more than 2,000 registered users. It attracted 53,000 new visitors and logged 140,000 page views, solidifying its role as a statewide hub for primary source education.

### ***Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York***

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York (DHPSNY) is a collaborative initiative between the New York State Archives and the New York State Library. The

program provides training and on-site support to nearly 3,000 non-governmental organizations that steward historical records and unique library research materials across the state. DHPSNY helps build the capacity of these organizations to sustainably care for the manuscripts, records, and rare books that preserve the diverse stories of all New Yorkers.

In 2024, DHPSNY rolled out a dynamic slate of learning opportunities, including webinars, a multi-week online course, and in-person workshops held statewide. Covering topics from emergency preparedness to major commemorative milestones like the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, these offerings drew strong participation and wide-reaching engagement. Live attendance was robust, and recorded sessions continued to attract thousands of views, amplifying DHPSNY's educational impact throughout the year.



Additionally, DHPSNY offered hands-on support to numerous organizations, helping them elevate their collections management and preservation practices. To further empower the field, DHPSNY maintains an active online hub featuring program details, a statewide directory of cultural heritage institutions, and a suite of practical resources. Its widely circulated bi-monthly newsletter, DHPSNY News, shares timely updates, funding opportunities, and highlights from across New York's vibrant cultural heritage community.

### **Public Broadcasting & Educational Television**

New York's public broadcasting network plays a vital role in delivering educational and cultural content to communities across the state. Through strategic investments and collaborative initiatives, the Public Broadcasting and Educational Television program office supports stations in their mission to inform, educate, and engage audiences of all ages.

In 2024, the Public Broadcasting and Educational Television office distributed \$14 million in state funding to support public radio and educational television stations across New York State. This annual investment helps sustain educational outreach and broadcast operations, ensuring that students, educators, and lifelong learners have continued access to vital information and engaging, high-quality programming.

The office also launched a statewide planning initiative in collaboration with the state's nine educational television stations, focused on two major upcoming anniversaries—the 250th Commemoration of the Declaration of Independence and the Erie Canal Bicentennial. This initiative includes the development of locally produced programming and community engagement activities tied to these historic milestones.

As part of the effort, stations are creating standards-aligned learning resources for students and educators, incorporating New York State-specific

content and materials from *The American Revolution* by Ken Burns. These multimedia resources will be available through PBS LearningMedia, a free digital platform that integrates easily with tools like Google Classroom. The program office continues to support this work by connecting stations with the rich collections housed within the Office of Cultural Education and providing ongoing guidance to producers and educators.

### **New York State Summer School for the Arts**

NYSSSA continues to champion access to high-level arts education for young people across New York. Through immersive training and expanded scholarship support, the program nurtures emerging talent and strengthens the pipeline of future artists, performers, and creative thinkers.

With a \$1.2 million Governor's appropriation, NYSSSA proudly reinstated three in-residency programs in July 2024 at SUNY Fredonia, where high school students from across the state spent three transformative weeks immersed in pre-professional artistic training. The 2024 programs focused on media arts, theatre, and visual arts—each designed to challenge and inspire the next generation of creative talent. NYSSSA staff also produced a short-form video capturing the energy and impact of the program's celebrated return.

In addition to its residency programs, the NYSSSA office awarded significant scholarship support to middle and high school students across the state. This assistance enabled young artists—many of whom may not have otherwise had access—to participate in community-based experiential arts programs aligned with their individual interests and goals. In 2025, the scholarship initiative expanded into a year-round model, offering students continued opportunities to pursue their artistic development throughout the year.



### ***Strengthening Foundations: How OCE is Preparing for a Vibrant Cultural Future for 2025–2026***

The Office of Cultural Education (OCE) enters 2025–2026 with renewed ambition and a clear vision: to work to make each of its branches—the State Museum, Library, Archives, Public Broadcasting, and the Summer School of the Arts—the best in the nation. This goal is grounded in our collective commitment to public service, scholarly excellence, and equitable access to cultural and educational resources. Building on the momentum of 2024–2025, we will continue to strengthen the foundation we’ve laid by advancing strategic initiatives that elevate our work, expand our reach, and deepen our impact statewide.

To achieve these objectives, the Office is prioritizing the refinement and realignment of its processes and systems across all divisions. This includes the ongoing professionalization of operations to ensure our work remains responsive, efficient, and strategically positioned for long-term success. We are systematically improving workflows, updating internal policies, strengthening communication channels, and aligning resources to support institutional excellence. Simultaneously, we are confronting structural challenges by advocating for dependable, long-term funding that accurately reflects the scale and impact of our mission. These actions represent not temporary fixes, but thoughtful investments in the Office’s continued growth, resilience, and public value.

A key step in advancing this vision is the active search for a new Museum Director to lead the New York State Museum into its next chapter. This leadership role is central to realizing the Museum’s potential as a national model for excellence in research, collections, exhibitions, and public engagement. The selected candidate will be charged with guiding the Museum’s continued transformation and ensuring its programs and operations meet the evolving needs of New Yorkers statewide. This search reflects our deep commitment to visionary leadership and to securing a strong, strategic foundation for the Museum’s future.

Internal improvements are just one part of the picture. OCE exists to serve the public, and in 2025–2026, we are deepening that commitment by further delivering our world-class programs, resources, and expertise to communities across the state. We believe that every New Yorker—regardless of geography, background, or circumstance—deserves access to the transformative power of cultural learning. Our mission transcends the physical boundaries of our institutions; it lives in classrooms, community centers, libraries, and local governments throughout







New York. This year, we will amplify the visibility of our work by showcasing the knowledge, creativity, and dedication of our experts in new and engaging ways—inviting the public to connect with the people behind the programs and to experience the impact of cultural education firsthand.

At its core, our strategy is about unlocking the full potential of OCE—not as a collection of separate institutions, but as a unified cultural engine driving discovery, creativity, and connection. We are here to inform, inspire, and ignite curiosity in every New Yorker. In 2025–2026, we’ll continue to dream bigger, think smarter, and move with purpose—energized by a deep belief in the power of public culture and driven by a shared commitment to becoming the best in the nation.

**“WE BELIEVE THAT  
EVERY NEW YORKER...**

**REGARDLESS  
OF GEOGRAPHY,  
BACKGROUND, OR  
CIRCUMSTANCE...**

**DESERVES  
ACCESS TO THE  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
POWER OF CULTURAL  
LEARNING”**

# REIMAGINING COMMUNICATION: HOW NYSED'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS TEAM IS SHAPING THE STORY OF EDUCATION

JP O'HARE, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

In today's fast-paced media landscape, the ability to communicate clearly, compellingly, and consistently is more than a skill—it's a strategic necessity. The Office of Communications at the New York State Education Department (NYSED) remains a vital bridge between the Department's work and the public it serves, translating complex policies into accessible narratives and building trust through transparency and engagement.

"Our job is not just to inform, but to inspire confidence in the Department, Board, and our education community."

## ***Telling the Department's Story: A Year in Review***

The Communications team, comprising seasoned professionals in media relations, digital content, education services, information technology, and administration, plays an instrumental role in shaping how the public perceives the initiatives of the Board of Regents and the Department.

In 2024–25, the Office continued to expand its reach and elevate its impact across all platforms. From social media milestones to cross-agency collaborations, the team not only amplified Department messages but also helped set the tone for strategic public engagement across New York State.

"Communication isn't an afterthought—it's a strategic tool that drives engagement and builds credibility."

## ***Social Media: Strengthening Community Connections***

Through thoughtful engagement and data-informed strategies, NYSED's social media presence experienced sustained growth. The Communications Office tapped into its press inquiry database to identify trending topics and tailor content accordingly.

On Twitter (now X), the Department reached 43,115 followers as of May 2025, remaining among the most-followed New York State agencies.

- Facebook followers rose from 26,524 in May 2024 to 28,966 in May 2025.
- On LinkedIn, growth was even more pronounced, from 23,751 to 29,416 followers.
- Instagram also saw a steady increase, from 1,816 to 2,388 followers over the year.

## ***Media Relations: Amplifying the Department's Voice***

Over the past year, the office crafted and disseminated 79 press releases and statements, advancing public understanding of NYSED priorities and Board initiatives. A notable effort was

the strategic inclusion of quotes from the Chancellor and Commissioner in other state agencies' releases, demonstrating unity across government sectors and reinforcing NYSED's leadership in collaborative projects.

## ***Newsletters: Keeping Stakeholders Informed***

With over 150 newsletters produced—ranging from News and Notes to My Brother's Keeper and specialized updates from Cultural Education and Education Policy—the team ensured that educators, families, and partners remained up to date with timely and relevant information.

## ***A Digital Infrastructure for Education***

One of the Department's most high-impact tools continues to be its website. The Communications Office provided sustained support to program offices in migrating sites to Drupal, and collaborated with the ITS Web Team on further upgrades.

From May 2024 to May 2025, the website attracted over 25 million users and 160 million pageviews, reflecting its role as a trusted information hub for families, educators, and stakeholders statewide.



### ***Video Storytelling: Visualizing NYSED's Vision***

This year's visual communications included a robust lineup of videos that brought policy to life:

- Back to School Video Series
- My Sister's Keeper Launch
- Budget and Legislative Priorities Series (shared exclusively via social media)
- My Brother's Keeper: Their Highest Potential (in post-production)

Additionally, videos supporting the Regents' budget proposals received strong engagement and helped demystify the Department's legislative agenda.

"Video allows us to meet people where they are—on their phones, in their homes, and in their communities."

### ***Supporting Cultural Education***

The Office provided vital support to the New York State Museum, Library, Archives, and the Summer School of the Arts through press releases, advisories, and media outreach. Communications also spanned internal platforms, such as the OCE Listserv and NYSED Weekly, and external engagement efforts, including podcasts and multiple specialized newsletters.

### ***Rapid Response and Federal Policy***

Throughout 2025, the Communications Office served as a nimble conduit between NYSED leadership and the public during key federal announcements. Collaborating with the Office of Counsel and senior leadership, the team ensured that NYSED's positions were clear, credible, and consistently communicated.

**"FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO FEDERAL POLICY, OUR GOAL IS CLEAR: CONNECT, CLARIFY, AND COMMUNICATE WITH TRUTH AND PURPOSE"**







### ***Graduation Measures and “NY Inspires”***

In November 2024, NYSED unveiled “NY Inspires”, a bold response to the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures. Communications played a central role in launching this initiative, which calls for a single diploma, proficiency-based credits, and an emphasis on career readiness, financial literacy, and climate education. The team continues to provide ongoing updates to ensure transparent progress reporting.

### ***A Showcase Event: My Brother’s Keeper Symposium***

With a multi-channel communications strategy, the team elevated the My Brother’s Keeper Symposium to new levels of visibility. From statewide and regional press outreach to student

interviews, radio/TV appearances, and social media content, the event garnered strong engagement and reflected the department’s deep commitment to equity and empowerment.

“Every interaction is an opportunity to inform and inspire.”

### ***Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025–26***

#### **New Communications Policy and Branding**

A major initiative for the coming year is the launch of a comprehensive Communications Policy and Style Guide, aimed at standardizing internal and external messaging. With this, a full Department rebranding effort will introduce refreshed logos, templates, and visual guidelines to modernize the Department’s identity.

“With a consistent voice and visual identity, we can unify our message and strengthen public trust.”

#### **Restructuring for Efficiency**

To better centralize communications functions, the office will restructure its staffing model—integrating public affairs, digital, and web support teams into a more cohesive unit capable of delivering faster, more strategic results across the Department.

#### **Digital Growth**

The Communications Office will complete the migration of all remaining websites in 2025–26 and implement new processes to assess and improve content quality across digital platforms.



# OFFICE OF COUNSEL:

## ADVOCATING FOR INTEGRITY, EQUITY, AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

DANIEL MORTON-BENTLEY, COUNSEL  
AND DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOR LEGAL AFFAIRS

The New York State Education Department's Office of Counsel (OC) stands as a pillar of integrity in the state's educational framework. Comprised of 20 attorneys and eight administrative professionals, this dedicated team provides essential legal guidance, drafts vital policies, ensures regulatory compliance, and represents the Department in a diverse range of legal proceedings—from administrative appeals to complex federal litigation.

### ***Upholding Fairness in Administrative Appeals***

Each year, OC handles between 150 and 180 administrative appeals. In 2024–25, the Commissioner issued 139 formal decisions, many of which were influenced by the Office's innovative settlement conference procedures. These conferences create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and often yield critical insights, even in cases where no settlement is reached.

Recent decisions reflect OC's unwavering commitment to fairness and student rights. In the Appeal of B.B. and H.B., the Commissioner ruled that suspensions from prekindergarten are categorically unacceptable. The Appeal of R.W. and C.W. underscored the need for disciplinary actions to be directly linked to school disruption, reinforcing protections for student rights. In the Application of T.L., the Office reaffirmed that discriminatory remarks against LGBTQ+ individuals have no place in public discourse, particularly from school board members.

Beyond appeals to the Commissioner, the Office also drafted numerous decisions under the Freedom of Information Law and in matters concerning teacher conduct and employment clearance.

### ***Championing the Public Interest In Litigation***

OC's litigation efforts in 2024–25 were defined by landmark victories that safeguarded student rights and upheld public values. The Office successfully defended the Board of Regents' ban on the use of Indigenous mascots and supported public health vaccination mandates. It played a central role in protecting school library book collections amid a surge of censorship efforts, brought resolution to a long-standing special education class action in New York City, and aided the Office of the Professions in legal actions against fraudulent nursing schools in Florida. These cases exemplify OC's deep-rooted commitment to equity, accountability, and public trust.

### ***Crafting Policy with Precision***

OC's regulatory expertise helped shape key education policies in collaboration with Department leadership. The team supported the introduction of interim suspension rules designed to safeguard student welfare while preserving due process rights. It helped align state regulations with federal accountability frameworks under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and clarified the statutory authority and responsibilities of District Superintendents.

### ***Supporting Contracts and Compliance with Legal Insight***

OC brought legal rigor to contract development and fiscal oversight. In 2024–25, the team facilitated \$30 million in contracts to support the modernization of the State Aid Management System. It also helped launch a new multi-state assessment that





will replace the NYSESLAT and established licensing terms for the Statewide Longitudinal Data System.

The Office ensured compliance with the State Finance Law while overseeing nearly \$500 million in federal relief funding. Anticipating the future, OC attorneys participated in forums and training focused on artificial intelligence, positioning the Department to navigate evolving legal and technological landscapes.

### ***Leading Privacy Protection in a Digital World***

OC's Privacy Office demonstrated proactive leadership in data protection throughout 2024. The team led New York's response to the PowerSchool data breach, which impacted over one million residents. In addition, they issued formal responses to parent complaints, launched AI-related interagency collaborations, and published an updated Parents' Bill of Rights. The Office also facilitated memorandums of understanding across several agencies, including the State University of New York (SUNY) and the Department of Health (DOH).

### ***Advancing Ethics and Professional Development***

The Ethics Office processed 100 outside activity requests, ensuring all staff activities aligned with Department policy. The Office also enhanced inter-office coordination to improve the transparency and efficiency of travel-related approvals. Through the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program, staff engaged in

sessions covering topics such as social media law, student privacy, and the drafting of appeals. OC attorneys further extended their influence by presenting at conferences throughout the state, spotlighting critical legal topics in education.

### ***Fostering Community and Communication***

The Office of Counsel strengthened its internal culture through consistent communication and relationship-building. Quarterly summaries of Commissioner decisions were circulated to keep staff informed, while staff engagement initiatives, including storytelling at meetings, cultivated camaraderie and mentorship.

### ***Looking Ahead: Innovation and Outreach***

OC is preparing to roll out a suite of new initiatives in 2025–26. These include launching a legal portal with integrated tracking software, implementing a five-year stakeholder survey, enhancing the Charters/Consents process for education entities, and expanding CLE offerings to share its legal expertise more broadly.

As federal policies continue to evolve, the Office of Counsel remains vigilant and proactive—building coalitions with other states and national organizations to preserve New York's educational autonomy and uphold its commitment to legal excellence.

# BUILDING BRIDGES, SHAPING POLICY: THE STRATEGIC WORK OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

JENNIFER TROWBRIDGE, DIRECTOR

At the intersection of education and policy, the Office of Government Relations has once again proven itself to be a linchpin in the strategic advancement of New York State's educational vision. The 2024–2025 fiscal year showcased a range of legislative priorities, thoughtful advocacy, and deep collaboration with state leaders—all of which underscore the Department's commitment to educational advancement.

## ***Championing Legislative Success***

Guided by the strategic vision of the Board of Regents and Department leadership, Government Relations led efforts to develop and advocate for the 2025 Budget and Legislative Priorities. These priorities translated into meaningful legislative achievements that support student opportunity and educational access across the board.

One of the most notable successes was the establishment of a dual enrollment policy, which now mandates formal partnership agreements between school districts and institutions of higher education. This policy ensures more equitable and consistent access for students seeking college credit during high school.

The Department successfully secured increased funding for all major Opportunity Programs. The Higher

Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) received a total of \$49,742,420, representing a \$714,000 increase from the prior year. The Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) saw funding rise to \$22,143,680, an increase of \$1,272,000. The Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) experienced a \$964,000 increase, bringing its total to \$16,780,390. Lastly, the Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) grew by \$1,476,000, for a total allocation of \$25,716,360.

In another major development, the aidable salary cap for BOCES was approved for a phased increase—rising to \$40,000 in 2026–2027, \$50,000 in 2027–2028, and \$60,000 in 2028–2029. Career and technical education received a boost as well, with 9th-grade students now included in eligibility for Special Services Aid and the per-student aid amount increased from \$3,900 to \$4,100.

**“WE’RE NOT ONLY ADVOCATING FOR POLICY-WE’RE HELPING SHAPE THE EDUCATION FUTURE OF EVERY STUDENT IN NEW YORK.”**

## ***Safeguarding Oversight and Collaboration***

Government Relations also played a vital role in protecting professional oversight standards. The office successfully advocated against proposals to transfer the oversight and licensing of physicians, physician assistants, and specialist assistants to the Department of Health, reasoning that the matter warranted further review and stakeholder input.

Additionally, the team helped amend a proposal concerning the Department of Labor's initiative to create and maintain a database for the employment of minors. The revised legislation now removes NYSED staff from the working paper process, ensuring the Department of Labor handles these responsibilities appropriately going forward.

## ***Advocacy in Action***

Beyond legislative and budget milestones, Government Relations led several strategic initiatives to strengthen connections with lawmakers and advance the Department's mission.

The team collaborated to host a successful Second Annual Coffee & Conversation event. This gathering brought together legislators from both chambers who serve on the Education, Higher Education, and Libraries Committees,



fostering dialogue on Board of Regents and Department priorities while also allowing legislators to share their perspectives.

To support state leadership's presence at the 2025 Joint Legislative Elementary & Secondary Education and Higher Education Hearings, Government Relations worked closely with Department staff to craft compelling testimony and informational materials. The office also managed follow-up requests by supplying detailed responses and data as needed.

Together with the Department's fiscal experts, Government Relations developed clear and comprehensive summary documents for the Executive Budget proposal, One House Budget proposals, and the final Enacted Budget. These materials served as valuable tools for understanding and tracking fiscal developments.

The office continued to manage a high volume of inquiries from legislative and executive offices, addressing daily constituent issues and policy questions with professionalism and responsiveness.

In support of legislative processes, Government Relations partnered with relevant program and fiscal staff to offer technical assistance on numerous bills. These efforts often included coordination with other agencies and stakeholder groups in the education and professional sectors.

Throughout the 2025 legislative session, the office diligently tracked, monitored, and reviewed a broad array of proposed legislation, identifying and analyzing bills that had potential implications for the Department and the field.

The team also maintained communication with state and federal officials regarding problematic executive orders and actions issued by the U.S. Department of Education, providing timely updates on the impact of these measures on New York schools.

***"Whether it's a classroom in Buffalo or a campus in the Bronx, our legislative efforts ripple through every corner of the state,"***

### **Looking Ahead: 2025–2026 Priorities**

As the Department looks to the next fiscal year, Government Relations is committed to refining and enhancing its policy and advocacy efforts.

The office will collaborate with the Board of Regents and Department leadership to streamline and improve the process for developing the 2026 Budget and Legislative Priorities. Efforts will also focus on enhancing current advocacy methods and building new coalitions to support key Department objectives.

In addition, the office plans to expand its provision of technical assistance to legislative offices, particularly during the off-session. Increased collaboration with other agencies and professional stakeholder groups will also be a priority, fostering shared solutions to policy challenges.

With a strong foundation and clear direction, the Office of Government Relations stands ready to continue advancing education in New York through impactful legislation and trusted policy leadership.



# EMPOWERING SCHOOLS THROUGH SMARTER FINANCE

CHRISTINA COUGHLIN, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

## ***Transforming the Lifeblood of Education: School Aid***

The New York State Education Department's Finance Office is committed to efficiency and transparency. The Finance team supports a wide scope of activity. For example, during the 2024–25 fiscal year, the Office of State Aid processed thousands of data points across more than 700 school districts and 37 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). This meticulous work enabled the precise calculation and disbursement of over \$35 billion in aid—making New York second only to California in its investment in public education.

But the work doesn't stop with distribution. The Finance team also developed future projections for both executive and legislative decision-makers using a variety of fiscal models. This forward-thinking approach helps guide state-level policy. We seek to ensure schools remain financially stable under changing economic conditions.

At the heart of this transformation is the **School Aid System Modernization Initiative**. We are collaborating with specialized vendors and we have documented over 1,000 pages of technical requirements. This project will reform and advance the digital age of aid

management. We are designing new interfaces to simplify complex processes such as building aid claims and capital construction reimbursement, making life easier for local education agencies and internal staff alike.

"This is more than just a system upgrade—it's a reimagination of how education funding flows in New York," said one project team lead.

## ***Special Education: Stabilizing Services Through Smarter Rates***

Special education funding is one of the most sensitive areas of fiscal management, and the Finance Office has made tremendous progress. The Rate-Setting team drastically reduced the waiver backlog from 119 to just 36 in one year—a milestone not achieved in over a decade. Review times dropped from 100 to 24 days, giving providers quicker access to updated tuition rates that include cost-of-living adjustments.

This timeliness allows special education providers to budget with confidence, ensuring students with disabilities receive uninterrupted, high-quality services.

Additionally, a newly approved methodology now allows NYSED to select

the more favorable of two rates—either the final reconciled rate or the previous year's prospective rate—when setting tuition. This change has helped reduce financial volatility for providers.

As part of its future forward focus, the team is conducting a comprehensive rate-setting methodology study, gathering feedback from providers, state agencies, and national research to determine the most equitable and sustainable path forward.

## ***From Confusion to Clarity: Making Data Work for Districts***

For years, district administrators have voiced frustrations about the disconnect between funding formulas and the data driving them. In response, the Finance Office introduced new data transparency tools this year, including enhanced reports that show which Student Information Repository System (SIRS) data directly impacts school aid.

These insights allow business officials to review and correct data submissions before deadlines close, offering districts a proactive way to secure funding and improve strategic planning.

The office's expertise was also sought out by the Rockefeller Institute,



where Finance staff contributed technical expertise to support potential revisions to the state's foundation aid formula.

This collaboration reinforces the office's role not just as the payer of the funds, but as a partner in policymaking.

### ***Grants Management Enters the 21st Century***

The modernization wave doesn't end with school aid. The Budget and Fiscal Management Units are also in the middle of a major leap forward by partnering with a software vendor to overhaul the department's grants administration process. The new system will eliminate paper submissions and introduce digital workflows, reduce administrative burdens on local education agencies and ensure fast and accurate payments.

The Department also transitioned its Special Legislative Projects and Bullet Aid programs—totaling more than \$54 million—to the Grants Gateway platform, enhancing oversight and efficiency.

### ***Efficiently and Effectively: Billions of Federal Funds Cleared***

The stakes are high when handling federal dollars, but the Finance Office delivered with distinction. In fiscal year 2024, the team completed the closeout of federal stimulus grants from CRSSA ESSER, GEER, and ARP ESSER. These totaled nearly \$11.5 billion in funding distributed to over 2,300 LEA grants.

An annual audit of these expenditures, conducted by independent firm KPMG, resulted in no findings—a rare and commendable outcome that reflects the office's robust internal controls and staff diligence.

"A clean audit at this scale isn't just an accomplishment—it's a benchmark for excellence," said a senior fiscal officer.

### ***Safeguarding Medicaid Reimbursements***

The STAC/Medicaid Unit continues to play a vital role in protecting districts

from costly compliance errors. Since New York State's \$539 million Medicaid settlement in 2009, the unit has provided technical assistance, conducted documentation reviews, and offered quarterly trainings to ensure that districts remain compliant.

In the past year alone, the team reviewed Medicaid billing practices in 129 school districts, representing a nearly 30% increase from the previous year. This proactive approach is critical to sustaining funding streams and avoiding disallowed claims.

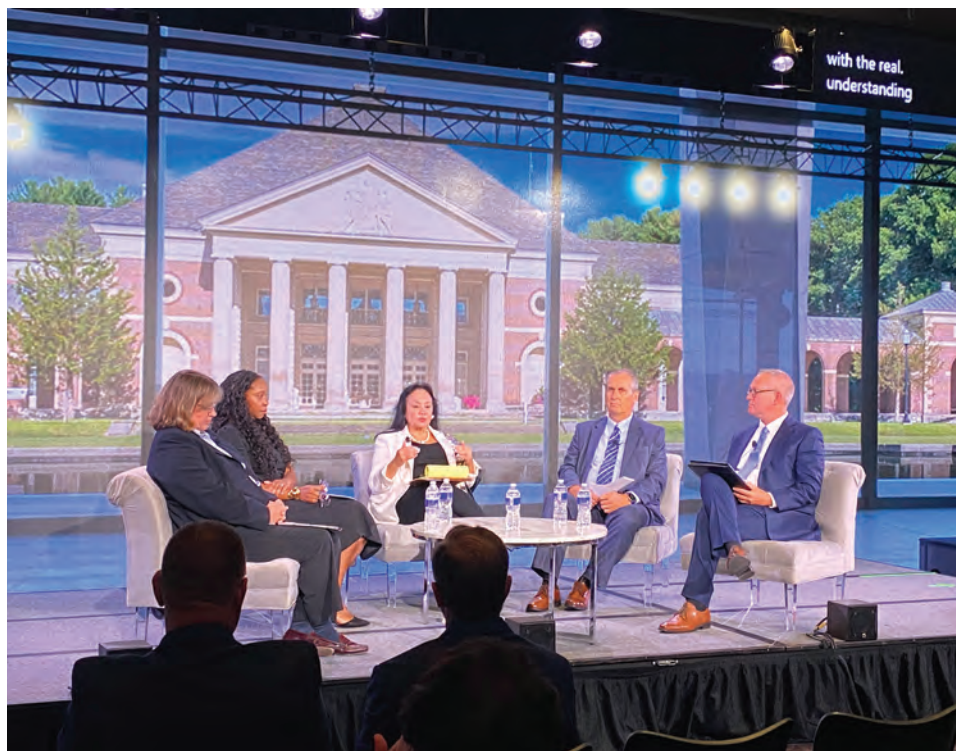
### ***Smart Contracts for a Modern Agency***

Procurement and contracting are now faster and more organized thanks to HighQ, a workflow management system launched by the Contract Administration Unit. This platform automates documentation, offers dashboard analytics, and reduces the time program offices spend on administrative tasks. It's a streamlined solution that aligns with the Department's broader commitment to modernization and efficiency.

### ***Charting the Path Ahead***

Looking forward to the 2025–26 fiscal year, the Finance Office is focused on three key priorities. First, it will provide accurate, timely data to support the Board of Regents' budget development. Second, it will continue advancing major modernization projects in grants management, rate setting, state aid, and special education data systems. Finally, the team is deeply committed to enhancing transparency across all financial operations, equipping leaders at every level with the information they need to optimize limited resources.

"Finance is the backbone of educational equity," noted a senior staff member. "When we get it right, everything else can fall into place."



# MODERNIZING EDUCATION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY: NYSED'S ITS REIMAGINED

MICHAEL ST. JOHN, CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

In an era defined by innovation, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is stepping confidently into the digital future. Under the leadership of Chief Information Officer Michael St. John, the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) has undergone a sweeping transformation—reimagining what's possible in public sector technology and laying the groundwork for an agile, resilient, and student-centered future.

## ***A Vision Reimagined***

The 2024–2025 fiscal year marked a bold new chapter for ITS. With a significant budgetary investment, the Department launched a structural and strategic overhaul that included the creation of three key units: the Cybersecurity Operations Unit, a Low-Code Development Unit, and an Enterprise Architecture (EA) Unit. Together, these teams form the backbone of a forward-thinking IT strategy built on modern architecture, security-first principles, and scalable development.

To support this shift, ITS established the Jira Intake System - a streamlined platform for submitting technology requests. Since its launch, over 500 requests have flowed through this system, empowering faster prioritization and project planning. Alongside this, a new partnership between ITS, the Office of Project Management, and the Enterprise Architecture team is ensuring that modernization initiatives are both strategic and sustainable.

## ***A Three-Pillar Approach***

### ***TECHNICAL SERVICES: The Engine Room of Modernization***

This past year, the ITS Technical Services team made great strides in solidifying NYSED's infrastructure. A major highlight was

the migration from the Oracle Database Appliance to the Private Cloud Appliance, aligning the Department with New York State's enterprise cloud-first strategy.

Other achievements include:

- A seamless transition to Jira Service Management, enhancing ticket tracking and transparency.
- Cloud-based backup and recovery services, significantly reducing downtime risk.
- Launch of a dedicated HR Service Desk portal, streamlining onboarding and personnel transactions.
- Network upgrades and bandwidth expansion to support growing digital demands.
- Implementation of Network Access Control (NAC) protocols to improve cybersecurity.
- An internal IT Communications Plan to boost awareness and accessibility of services.

## ***BUSINESS SOLUTIONS: Building Smarter, Faster***

To keep pace with the rapidly evolving landscape of education, ITS introduced a Low-Code Development Unit that enables rapid application development with minimal traditional coding. This initiative accelerates the delivery of customized solutions tailored to program-specific needs.

The Enterprise Architecture team worked in tandem to ensure these innovations are not only effective today but sustainable into the future. Together, they spearheaded several key modernization efforts.

Among the most notable accomplishments was the revitalization of the High School Equivalency (HSE) system, accompanied by an ongoing overhaul of the BPSS platform to



improve user experience and security. The TEACH system saw enhancements including real-time recommendations and fortified security protocols, bringing it in line with modern standards.

To better serve ACCES-VR, a new secure and scalable data-sharing platform was developed. Meanwhile, the Project Management Information System (PMIS) was successfully migrated to a Java-based platform, and real-time legislative data was integrated into the Bill Comment system via the NYS Legislative API.

Automated testing was deployed in the EFRT system, and multiple environments were established using the Microsoft Power Platform, paving the way for scalable digital transformation.

### ***PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE: Driving Change Across the Agency***

The Project Management Office (PMO) has been instrumental in orchestrating NYSED's technology transformation, ensuring alignment between strategic vision and operational execution. Over the past year, the PMO digitized the final Scantron-based process—the Scholarships for Academic Excellence survey—marking the full transition to digital data collection.

The team led the development of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for modernization initiatives targeting Audit Services and College Evaluation. They also oversaw the evolution of the TEACH and HR systems through a series of targeted Requests for Information (RFIs).

A significant achievement came with the launch of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) in the Microsoft Azure Cloud, a foundational step toward data-driven decision-making. Additionally, the PMO hosted a series of Data Governance events, drawing participation from more than 15 agencies, and provided strategic counsel on the ethical use of artificial intelligence as part of the SUNY STRIVE Task Force.

### ***LOOKING AHEAD: 2025–2026 Priorities***

Looking to the future, ITS is focused on completing the SAMS rollover, introducing dynamic and district-customized forms to better meet local needs. The Department also plans to fully eliminate any remaining TEACH system dependencies on mainframe technology.

Modernization of both the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision (BPSS) and ACCES-VR systems is expected to be finalized in the upcoming year. Additionally, ITS aims to implement new Enterprise Architecture standards across all projects, establishing a unified framework for development and integration.

To enhance scalability and resilience, the team is preparing to migrate applications to the Azure Cloud, with the goal of retiring unsupported legacy platforms and building a more robust digital foundation.

### ***A Culture of Innovation and Inclusion***

Through its investments in cloud infrastructure, automation, security, and agile development, NYSED's ITS is building the foundation for a more connected, efficient, and responsive public education system.

**“THESE CHANGES ARE NOT JUST TECHNICAL-THEY REPRESENT A CULTURAL SHIFT TOWARD SMARTER, FASTER, AND MORE INCLUSIVE SERVICE DELIVERY THAT WILL BENEFIT STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS NEW YORK FOR YEARS TO COME.”**



# OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION: HUMAN RESOURCES AT THE HEART OF NYSED

ANNE FISCARELLI, DIRECTOR

The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) stands at the heart of the New York State Education Department (NYSED), managing the essential lifeline of the organization—its people. With a commitment to excellence and a dedication to fostering a high-performing workforce, OHRM meticulously handles a broad spectrum of responsibilities. From recruiting top talent and overseeing onboarding procedures to managing employee relations and retirement processes, OHRM serves as a vital partner, deeply embedded in strategic planning and integral to advancing the Department's mission.

The OHRM team is led by a dedicated director and supported by key leaders overseeing staffing and employee development, personnel for administrative services, and equal opportunity, with the labor relations role currently vacant. This cohesive leadership team works to deliver responsive and effective services in alignment with New York State's legal frameworks and employment regulations.

## ***Staffing and Employee Development***

The Staffing and Employee Development Unit is pivotal to maintaining SED's operational excellence. Christie Nunziato's team focuses on robust recruitment strategies, meticulous position management, and the essential task of employee evaluations. A standout achievement has been the successful implementation of the HELPS Program,

a strategic initiative enabling rapid and efficient hiring. Since its inception, the HELPS Program facilitated the appointment of 572 individuals, including significantly enhancing workforce stability by converting 169 temporary, provisional employees to permanent status

The program's success is evident through a dramatic 300% increase in applicants for critical professional roles. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor applications alone rose to over 3,000 in 2024, showcasing the program's significant impact. Continuous innovation remains a hallmark of this unit, evidenced by their adoption of LinkedIn Recruiter to attract high-caliber candidates.

However, advancements are urgently needed to modernize technology systems. The current recruitment tracking method—based on Outlook and Access databases—is inefficient and susceptible to data loss. Advocacy for a modern HR platform, such as Workday, is essential for streamlining recruitment processes and enhancing candidate experiences. Additionally, securing a long-term contract with LinkedIn remains a priority to sustain effective recruitment strategies.



## ***Employee Training and Professional Development***

Ensuring ongoing professional growth, the Training Unit provides both online and in-person learning opportunities tailored to meet diverse departmental needs. With the launch of new courses like Employee Evaluations, Employee Grievances, and Leading Through Change, the Training Unit remains responsive to evolving workplace requirements. Notably, the SED Supervisory Certificate Program, established in 2023, already boasts 248 enrolled employees, emphasizing skill development crucial to effective leadership.

The unit also manages mandated training compliance across critical areas, including ethics, diversity, privacy, and workplace safety. Annual service awards



recognizing employee milestones have further enriched workplace culture, though expanded budget support is necessary to enhance these events.

Advocacy efforts should also focus on modernizing new staff orientation materials and quick reference guides for better accessibility, and implementing self-led, on-demand training solutions through platforms like Empire Knowledge Bank or LinkedIn Learning.

### ***Administrative Services: Health Benefits and Payroll***

Under Nikki Gregory, Administrative Services diligently oversees health benefits, leave management, worker's compensation, and payroll administration, significantly impacting employee satisfaction and operational integrity. With over 4,000 health insurance transactions processed and meticulous payroll management encompassing multiple state agencies, accuracy remains paramount. A notable achievement includes promulgating new regulations that clarify and improve conditions for BOCES District Superintendents, ultimately supporting retention. Yet, this unit faces significant staffing challenges, particularly in Payroll, underscoring the need for increased resource allocation to maintain service quality. Advocacy is essential for securing additional staffing resources to address this issue and ensure continued accurate and timely payroll services.

### ***Bureau of Labor Relations***

Though currently experiencing a transitional phase with leadership vacancies, the Bureau of Labor Relations remains a cornerstone for maintaining workplace harmony through effective grievance handling, disciplinary actions, and labor-management communications. Managing 438 cases in the past year, the Bureau underscores the critical importance of stable leadership to continue providing essential support for both management and employees.

Advocacy efforts must prioritize stabilizing staffing levels and quickly filling leadership vacancies to maintain effective labor relations management.

### ***Office of Diversity and Access***

The Office of Diversity and Access (ODA), guided by LaShanna King, champions a culture of inclusivity and equity. ODA's extensive programming, including cultural heritage celebrations and proactive diversity outreach, significantly enriches departmental culture and employee engagement. Cultural events celebrating initiatives as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), Veterans Appreciation, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Arab American History Month, Asian American Pacific Islander Month and Pride Month are several highlights of this initiative. These events have been shown to boost employee morale, increase empathy and understanding, and support the Department's diversity, equity, inclusion and access initiatives.

ODA's robust management of reasonable accommodations and discrimination investigations is critical in ensuring a respectful and equitable work environment. However, dedicated funding for cultural events and improved outreach materials remains an advocacy priority to sustain and expand this impactful work. It is crucial to secure a dedicated budget source to continue hosting successful events that significantly boost morale and reinforce core values during challenging times.

### ***Data Management and Support Functions***

Supporting these extensive operations, OHRM's small data unit and dedicated clerical team effectively handle administrative functions, database management, FOIL requests, and customer service. Yet, reliance on outdated homegrown systems highlights an urgent need for technological upgrades, particularly in implementing advanced candidate management systems. Advocacy for adopting a comprehensive cloud-based solution like Workday is essential to modernize and streamline processes, ensuring robust data management and an enhanced candidate experience.

### ***Commitment to Excellence***

OHRM's comprehensive approach, integrating strategic initiatives with meticulous operational oversight, exemplifies its foundational role within SED. Recognizing employees as its greatest asset, OHRM remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering a supportive, efficient, and inclusive workplace, continuously striving for excellence in service delivery and organizational impact.



