



# THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

## TESTIMONY

Presented to

Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature  
 Hearing On  
 The FY 2016-2017 Executive Budget  
 January 27, 2016  
 Albany, New York

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Cleary School for the Deaf (Nesconset)	Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf (Mill Neck)	St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
Henry Viscardi School (Albertson)	New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)	St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)
Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)	New York School for the Deaf (White Plains)	St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Buffalo)
Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)	Rochester School for the Deaf (Rochester)	



Hello, my name is Bernadette Kappen, and I am executive director of the New York Institute for Special Education. I am pleased to be joined today by Timothy Kelly, superintendent of St. Mary's School for the Deaf in Buffalo, and Vivian Higuaita, a junior at the Institute.

As Chair of the *4201 Schools Association*, representing eleven schools serving students who are deaf, blind and severely physically disabled throughout New York State, I would like to extend our appreciation for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the 2016-17 Executive Budget as it relates to issues impacting our students.

To begin, we would like to thank the Legislature for your longstanding support of our students. Specifically, we appreciate the 2.4% increase provided in last year's budget. This increase, which resulted in a \$2.3 million investment in our schools, was the first increase in six years. It is the first investment in our schools since our funding system was dramatically changed in 2011-12. While grateful for the additional support, we were apprehensive that the additional funds would be considered a single year investment. We are so pleased that the 2016-17 Executive budget recognizes the ongoing programmatic needs of our schools and includes the additional \$2.3 million.

In addition, we would extend our appreciation for the additional support provided by the Smart School's Bond Act. The advocacy of the Legislature was instrumental in securing additional funds to support an investment in technology at special education schools. Recently the New York State Education Department has informed the schools of their allotment which was based on a per student allocation. A total of \$411,774 was made available to the 4201 schools. Awards ranged from \$19,456 to \$85,066, with an average award \$37,434. We anticipate that the Department will soon publish the process by which schools will access the resources and implement the investment in technology.

As you know, the 2016-17 Executive Budget recommends a modest additional investment in public education. Over the next several weeks, Legislators and education advocates will have a robust discussion on how best to fund public education. We hope that while those discussions ensue you will consider the needs of the students at our schools too.

We recommend that our funding be increased on par with the final increase afforded to public education as the students in our schools would be supported by a school aid increase if not for the nature of their disability. Similar to last year, we recommend that an increase be provided directly to the schools and be considered ongoing operational support. A direct increase also ensures that local school districts are not adversely impacted by the state's investment.

While we are extremely grateful for the investment made to our schools last year, the accumulated effect of 6 years of zero percent growth on our ability to appropriately maintain our facilities and grounds has been compromised. We recommend the investment of \$11 million for the 4201 schools in support of deferred maintenance. The health and safety of our students and staff is critical. An investment would allow our schools to fix roofs, replace boilers, upgrade electrical and plumbing, and modernize fire and safety equipment, etc.

The 4201 schools are proud to be a partner with New York State in ensuring high quality educational opportunity to students with low incidence disabilities. We take our responsibility to provide each of our students with a safe and healthy environment by which to grow and succeed. We appreciate the support provided that makes our schools a reality to the students we serve across the state. Thank you.

Submitted by,

Bernadette M. Kappen, Ph.D.  
Chair, 4201 Schools Association  
Executive Director, New York Institute for Special Education

Timothy M. Kelly  
Vice Chair, 4201 Schools Association  
Superintendent, St. Mary's School for the Deaf

### Background Information

For more than 200 years, the people of New York have relied on the expertise of the 4201 Schools to provide educational services to children who are deaf, blind and severely physically disabled. There are eleven "4201" schools located throughout the state, both upstate and downstate.

Each school is governed by its own Board of Directors, receives financial support for operating expenses from the State, and depends on private donations for program enhancements and innovations. The 4201 Schools have established a long tradition of excellence in education and in providing innovative educational services to our students and their families.

The 4201 Schools and their locations are as follows:

- Cleary School for the Deaf - Nesconset
- Henry Viscardi School- Albertson
- Lavelle School for the Blind - Bronx
- Lexington School for the Deaf - Queens
- Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf - Mill Neck
- New York Institute for Special Education - Bronx
- New York School for the Deaf - White Plains
- Rochester School for the Deaf - Rochester
- St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf - Brooklyn
- St. Joseph's School for the Deaf - Bronx
- St. Mary's School for the Deaf - Buffalo

Under Section 4201 of the Education Law, the State has designated and authorized certain private schools to serve the special education needs of deaf or blind or physically disabled students. Students come to 4201 Schools upon application by their parents or school districts, and with the approval of the State Education Commissioner. Several 4201 Schools maintain residential programs, which are also funded through lump sum budget appropriations.

Only students who are profoundly deaf, legally blind, severely physically disabled, or severely emotionally disabled are referred to the 4201 Schools by local school districts, parents, physicians, clinics and other interested parties. An intake evaluation by the 4201 School is completed, and placement is made upon the recommendation of and approval by the student's home school district and the Commissioner of Education. Approval is based on the availability of an appropriate education program. There are no charges or fees to parents for educational costs, transportation, room or board.

Our students benefit from the academic programs, vocational programs, life skills programs and other specially designed programs at the 4201 Schools. They also take part in the interscholastic sports and other extra-curricular and co-curricular activities at their school. Our schools also work with children with multiple disabilities, for whom the schools are educational/therapeutic environments that foster growth and development in all areas - academic, sensory, and physically. Some of our students with multiple disabilities may always need certain supports to achieve an interdependent adult life, but for whom academic and personal success is attainable and an important part of our schools' mission.

Those students requiring a 24-hour structured environment as noted in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or whose homes are too far to commute back and forth to school each day live on campus for five days a week at some of the 4201 Schools. There are comprehensive learning and recreational programs for students residing in school dormitories.

The 4201 Schools provide quality education services to children with low incidence disabilities. Our schools are working constantly to support the academic progress and success of the students we serve.

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Remarks of Vivian Higuita  
As Prepared for Delivery to the Joint Fiscal  
Committees of the Legislature  
Education Hearing  
January 27, 2016

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Thank you, Dr. Kappen.

And thank you members of the Legislature.

My name is Vivian Higuita. I go to the New York Institute for Special Education. I have been a student at the Institute since 2003. And I live in College Point Queens with my family – and we cheer for the Mets and the Yankees.

My favorite subjects are math, as well practical instruction that readies me for the real world.

I am visually impaired – my vision is 20/250 and while not blind, my vision is severely limited, and without the benefits of numerous surgeries, technologies and specialized instruction I would not be able to read, write or conduct the everyday activities you may take for granted.

With my right eye, I get to see, and with the help of several specialized devices I can write and read.

These include:

My hand-held magnifier:

A visio-book to provide mobil magnification of written material;

A victorstream to provide downloaded audio content;

A telescope for assistance with long-distance vision such as in an auditorium or theatre; and

My ipad.

These are essential devices for those who are visually impaired or with low-vision, such as my classmates.

Many of my class mates reside on our campus five days a week, while others such as myself, get up each morning, board a school bus.

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For each of us to succeed and to accomplish our future goals we need a school such as the Institute to accommodate our needs. And, the individualize instruction we receive from our teachers also helps us understand challenging material.

When I graduate from the Institute it is my goal to enroll at Queens College where I would like to study vocational education in the hope of providing the type of support to others that I have received.

I am here today because I want to be a participant in the process. Today is my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I am committed to lending my voice to advocate for my classmates and friends who are blind, deaf or severely disabled.

Thank you.