



# *Testimony*

**to the  
Senate Finance Committee  
and  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee  
on the  
Proposed 2023-24 Executive Budget  
for  
Elementary and Secondary Education  
February 8, 2023**

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*Representing more than 600,000 professionals in education and health care  
Affiliated with the AFT – NEA – AFL-CIO*

*Testimony of  
Andrew Pallotta,  
President  
New York State United Teachers  
to the  
Senate Finance Committee  
Liz Krueger, Chair  
and  
Assembly Ways and Means Committee  
Helene E. Weinstein, Chair  
on the  
Proposed 2023-24 Executive Budget  
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Chairperson Krueger, Chairperson Weinstein, honorable members of the Legislature and distinguished staff, I am Andrew Pallotta, President of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). NYSUT represents more than 675,000 teachers, school-related professionals, academic and professional faculty and staff in higher education, professionals in education, in health care and retirees statewide.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the proposed 2023-24 New York State Executive Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education. I am joined by Karen Alford, Vice President for Elementary Schools at the United Federation of Teachers.

I want to thank you and your colleagues for the work you did on last year's enacted budget and getting our students and their schools to the point where we are looking at fully funding and a complete phase-in of the Foundation Aid Formula. Your work in partnership with the governor has delivered on the promise that was made to fully fund the formula. However, our public schools and the dedicated educators working in them need additional resources to address the needs of our students and help them to thrive. Below, I will detail a number of programs that affect public schools and will discuss ways that the Legislature can address these programs to benefit students throughout our state.

### **Foundation Aid**

Our members, students and their school communities are still recovering from the lingering effects of the pandemic. Public school districts are also dealing with four-decade-high inflation and staffing shortages while still providing a much wider array of services to address the needs of students as a whole – from mental health to nutrition to ensuring students have access to quality social-emotional learning through curriculum and activities.

Completing the phase-in this year and supporting our students is making a real difference in your districts throughout the state. NYSUT is thankful to the governor for including the full phase-in amount for the Foundation Aid Formula in the executive budget proposal and we look forward to advocating with you and your colleagues in the Legislature to ensure that this year, the phase-in is completed.

NYSUT, along with other members of the Educational Conference Board (ECB), are supportive of the State Education Department's (SED) full review of the Foundation Aid Formula – a formula which has not been updated since it was first written. Parts of the Foundation Aid Formula need to be updated, such as the Foundation Amount, or the base level of funding required to successfully educate a student; the Pupil Needs Index, or the amount of targeted additional funding for things such as English language learners; and the Regional Cost Index, or the portion of the formula which accounts for the cost of living in each region of the state. We believe that SED has the expertise to harness its relationship with the Legislature, stakeholders and the public to undertake such a review.

### **Foundation Aid Set-Asides**

The executive budget proposal contains a number of set-asides within Foundation Aid, such as a long-standing set-aside for community schools and a new set-aside for high-impact tutoring, both of which are worthy programs. NYSUT has long had concerns with set-asides within Foundation Aid funding, as opposed to creating separate grant programs. Foundation Aid should not be diluted by the continuance or creation of set-asides that reduce the flexibility of a school district to use these funds.

### **Expense-Based Aids**

NYSUT is pleased to see that the executive budget proposal includes the full funding of the expense-based aids, without any changes to the way in which school districts are reimbursed for services. Thanks to both the Legislature and the governor for recognizing the important part that these reimbursements play in helping students to learn and educators to teach.

### **Community Schools**

Community schools are proven to have a positive impact on student attendance, credit accumulation and on-time progression. They focus on services that assist in developing student learning, closing the achievement gap, building stronger families and creating healthier communities. Community schools serve as a hub for the community, bringing needed services and programs together for the school community, which not only includes students but family members as well. This model is not a one-size fits all and is created with input from the community to ensure that local needs are met.

At the heart of the community school strategy is a community school director, who is charged with developing, creating and administering the program and its services. The director develops partnerships with community-based organizations, health care providers and others to meet the unique needs of the school community. According to a 2019 case study by the ABC Community School Partnership, a coordinator or director is crucial as they create, strengthen and maintain the bridge between the school and the community.

The 2023-24 executive budget continues to provide \$250 million in community school funding as a set-aside through Foundation Aid. NYSUT continues to advocate for the creation of \$100 million in categorical funding, housed outside of Foundation Aid, in the 2023-24 state budget, to expand the number of community schools and to support the hiring of a Community Schools Director. The set-aside in current law redirects Foundation Aid and allows school districts to use the funds for a variety of purposes and are not solely to support community schools.

According to data released by the New York State Education Department, less than 2 percent of school districts have a community school director. In New York City, UFT's United Community Schools' data shows that a \$100,000 investment to hire a community school director can bring in more than \$600,000 in services and grants to the school community, a 6-to-1 return on investment (ROI). In the schools that encompass Waterville, Rome, Dolgeville and the Town of Webb, the average ROI is \$14+ for every \$1 invested. These are just two examples that illustrate the value of the state's investment in community schools and the value in having a community school director.

In addition, we urge the Legislature to continue the \$4 million grant proposed in the executive budget proposal to sustain the current network of United Community Schools and provide an additional \$5 million to help them expand their union-led community school model and apply their expertise to school districts statewide. Furthermore, we encourage you to provide \$1.2 million for services and expenses for three community school regional technical assistance centers.

### **RECOVS Grants**

NYSUT applauds the governor for the reappropriation of \$100 million for the RECOV grants that the Legislature and governor worked to deliver in last year's enacted budget. While we are happy to see that the program has been pushed out to this current school year, and next, so that school districts and BOCES can take full advantage of these funds, we are dismayed that this important program has been mired in the Division of the Budget's internal approval process and was not available for the current school year. We await the forthcoming release of a request for proposals, so that school districts and BOCES can hire the mental health professionals and provide services that students need

### **Universal Pre-Kindergarten**

NYSUT has long been an advocate for the expansion of universal pre-kindergarten, our members know how important it is for families to have access to pre-kindergarten programs, which help to build the foundation of a student's educational career. While we are excited by the steps the state has taken in the past few years and the proposals contained in the executive budget submission, NYSUT is concerned that school districts are contracting out for this service rather than building internal capacity. The law requires school districts to set-aside not less than 10 percent of grant funds to be used for a collaborative agreement for the delivery of these services. Our members report, that many districts are contracting out the entirety of the grant and have not made attempts to create capacity within their school buildings. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that children have access to a continuum of services and to certified teachers. Certified teachers provide a quality education and better outcomes for students. We urge the Legislature to require school districts that contract out for these services be required to submit a plan to the State Education Department detailing how they will expand capacity to deliver services within the district and fully phase-in the use of certified teachers within three years.

## **Library Materials Aid**

Dara Berkwits, a library media specialist in the Mahopac High School and a member of NYSUT's Library Media Specialist Subject Area Committee, recently shared, "It is becoming increasingly more difficult to serve our populations with the print rich materials our students so desperately need. Quality collections should be continuously analyzed, books removed and added and supplemented to meet the needs of the students who utilize them. Unfortunately, many school library collections are not being analyzed, nor are they having additions and removals as they should, due to a lack of sufficient funding to replace materials and add to collections. As a result, school library collections may contain outdated or inaccurate information. This does the exact opposite of what we aim to do for our students. Our students deserve accurate information along with quality pleasure reading materials."

When schools switched to remote learning in March of 2020, due to COVID-19, many library materials went home "for two weeks." Across the state, many of these materials never made it back into our school libraries and are considered "unrecoverable." The current reimbursement rate of \$6.25 per student, set in 2007, is making it nearly impossible for our school librarians to both replace items from their collections that left due to COVID-19 and provide new, updated resources and materials that will help their students achieve.

NYSUT is in full support of and urges the Legislature to include in the enacted budget, the New York State Board of Regents' December 2022 aid proposal seeking an increase in Library Materials Aid from \$6.25 to \$10.55 per pupil. This would go a long way in helping to replenish, grow and broaden the resources available in our school libraries.

## **Ending Student Hunger**

In June, federal waivers ensuring every student in the nation had access to free school meals expired. As a result, more than 726,000 students in New York state lost access to free school meals. Federal funds cover the majority of school meals in New York, drawing down over \$1 billion annually under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

The executive budget continues to fund school meal programs at the SFY 2022-23 levels. Studies show hunger hinders a student's ability to learn, so a well-fed student is more focused, better able to learn and feels supported, which results in improved academic performance, increased attendance and better classroom behavior. In New York, we must give every child the same chance to succeed and provide equal access to nutritious meals.

Our members continue to report high levels of food insecurity in their communities. A recent survey of schools across New York state underscores the widespread need and urgency for statewide free school meals for all, as families struggle to pay and schools cope with the accumulation of unpaid school meal debt. Approximately 60 percent of respondents say their debt stems from families who are unable to pay for school meals.

While 75 percent of New York's neediest students receive free meals, school meal debt is on track to hit historic highs. This indicates that many families who do not qualify for free meals are still unable to pay off overdue balances from even reduced-price lunches.

NYSUT is part of a coalition of over 240 education groups, nonprofits, labor unions and parent groups that support establishing a “Healthy School Meals for All” program. The Coalition is asking New York state to fund meal costs not covered by federal reimbursement – an anticipated investment of approximately \$200 million per year. With this funding, nearly 2000 additional schools in New York state would be able to provide universal free school meals and help put an end to student hunger.

## **Charter Schools**

Charter schools were created to serve as laboratories for the development, refinement and creation of innovative and effective educational best practices to be shared with public schools. While well intended, charter schools share very little with regard to best practices and have become a financial burden on school districts.

The 2023-24 executive budget combines the two regional caps (New York city and the rest of the state) into a single, statewide cap and proposes to permanently authorize the reissuance of any charter that subsequently closed due to surrender, revocation, termination or non-renewal – otherwise known as zombie charter schools. Accordingly, this proposal permanently allows for the reissuance of revoked, suspended or surrendered charter authorizations.

Regional caps were established to curtail the saturation of charter schools in an area and limit the financial burden on the public school district. Combining the caps and allowing for the reissuance of charter schools would be financially devastating to many public-school communities that have no say as to whether a charter school can or should be in their communities.

As of September 2022, which is the last public update from SED, there were 22 zombie charters – 14 in New York city and 8 in the rest of the state. In 2015, 26 zombie charters were allowed to be reissued but only for a limited time. In addition to these 22 zombies, there are currently 84 charter school slots available in rest of the state. The two budget proposals would allow for 106 new charter schools to open, which could potentially turn into 318, due to a loophole in the authorizing law.

## **Closing the Grade Expansion Loophole**

The charter industry continues to use loopholes in the Charter School Act law to circumvent the statutory cap on charter schools by expanding their grades and creating entirely new schools that were never part of their original application. For example, a charter school may have been originally authorized to serve k-6, but then submits a revision to expand grade levels to serve 9<sup>th</sup> grade and open a middle school. The original application for one school has now turned into two and can also be further revised to include a high school. That one school has now turned into three.

The state must maintain the integrity of the existing statutory cap and restrict grade expansions for these schools to thoroughly examine the fiscal and programmatic implications such new grades would have on the public school district.

We urge the Legislature to enact S.2974 by Senator Mayer to close this grade expansion loophole.

## Saturation and Financial Burden

In New York state, there are twenty-one school districts where more than five percent of their total enrollment attends a charter school. From 2017-18 through 2022-23, these twenty-one districts have increased their payments to charter schools by \$1.2 billion, or 56 percent. This growth in payments to charter schools was driven by increases in charter enrollment and charter school tuition rates.

In Nassau County, during this five-year period, Uniondale had a 79 percent increase in Foundation Aid and a 254 percent increase in payments to charter schools. Just up the road in Hempstead, the district received a 69 percent increase in Foundation Aid and a 159 percent increase in payments to charter schools. If we look at the other end of the state, Sloan in Erie County, saw a 14 percent increase in Foundation Aid and a 94 percent increase in payments to charter schools.

If I was to drive you within fifteen minutes of this hearing, we could visit three local school districts that all pay more in charter school payments than they have received in increases in Foundation Aid – Green Island, Menands and Watervliet – all in Albany County.

### Districts with more than 5% of students enrolled in charter schools

	Increase in Foundation Aid				Increase in Charter School Payments				% of Enrollment In Charter Schools	# of Charter Schools in the District
	2017-18	2022-23	Increase in	%	2017-18	2022-23	Increase in	%		
	Foundation Aid	Foundation Aid	Foundation Aid	Increase	Payments to Charter Schools	Payments to Charter Schools (Est)	Payments to Charter Schools	% Increase		
ALBANY	\$74,678,483	\$106,726,583	\$32,048,100	43%	\$31,281,045	\$38,735,785	\$7,454,740	24%	22%	8
BUFFALO	\$511,147,503	\$619,593,000	\$108,445,497	21%	\$118,342,624	\$155,452,051	\$37,109,427	31%	27%	20
CHEEKTOWAGA	\$8,365,164	\$14,980,320	\$6,615,156	79%	\$1,391,790	\$1,731,204	\$339,414	24%	6%	0
ELMIRA	\$60,403,770	\$71,757,688	\$11,353,918	19%	\$3,676,759	\$4,500,000	\$823,241	22%	6%	1
GREEN ISLAND	\$2,189,977	\$2,534,508	\$344,531	16%	\$195,257	\$250,500	\$55,243	28%	6%	0
HEMPSTEAD	\$83,930,884	\$141,585,464	\$57,654,580	69%	\$25,931,593	\$67,167,200	\$41,235,607	159%	33%	2
LACKAWANNA	\$26,258,284	\$35,376,783	\$9,118,499	35%	\$9,863,351	\$12,580,675	\$2,717,324	28%	31%	1
LANSINGBURGH	\$19,709,758	\$27,480,344	\$7,770,586	39%	\$979,048	\$2,141,223	\$1,162,175	119%	8%	0
MENANDS	\$389,843	\$1,074,456	\$684,613	176%	\$137,615	\$320,839	\$183,224	133%	6%	0
MOUNT VERNON	\$71,128,857	\$81,529,562	\$10,400,705	15%	\$7,165,630	\$10,270,265	\$3,104,635	43%	7%	2
NIAGARA FALLS	\$79,766,331	\$96,567,449	\$16,801,118	21%	\$4,276,762	\$4,697,500	\$420,738	10%	5%	0
RIVERHEAD	\$15,571,406	\$38,359,515	\$22,788,109	146%	\$5,038,720	\$10,355,938	\$5,317,218	106%	8%	1
ROCHESTER	\$421,948,812	\$510,125,246	\$88,176,434	21%	\$77,490,372	\$107,296,896	\$29,806,524	38%	26%	15
ROOSEVELT	\$35,039,234	\$58,305,125	\$23,265,891	66%	\$5,097,196	\$8,735,206	\$3,638,010	71%	14%	1
SLOAN	\$10,282,657	\$11,726,685	\$1,444,028	14%	\$451,420	\$875,750	\$424,330	94%	5%	0
SYRACUSE	\$271,731,423	\$323,237,845	\$51,506,422	19%	\$22,401,696	\$32,772,126	\$10,370,430	46%	11%	4
TROY	\$41,653,716	\$52,607,842	\$10,954,126	26%	\$10,325,347	\$12,502,325	\$2,176,978	21%	17%	1
UNIONDALE	\$33,269,423	\$59,652,134	\$26,382,711	79%	\$4,973,118	\$17,615,000	\$12,641,882	254%	12%	1
UTICA	\$94,917,871	\$133,740,244	\$38,822,373	41%	\$4,039,140	\$9,227,790	\$5,188,650	128%	7%	1
WATERVLIET	\$12,181,591	\$17,260,744	\$5,079,153	42%	\$614,847	\$933,000	\$318,153	52%	6%	0
NEW YORK CITY	\$7,451,928,633	\$8,933,549,731	\$1,481,621,098	20%	\$1,880,740,418	\$2,946,966,615	\$1,066,226,197	57%	15%	288
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,326,493,620</b>	<b>\$11,337,771,268</b>	<b>\$2,011,277,648</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>\$2,214,413,748</b>	<b>\$3,445,127,888</b>	<b>\$1,230,714,140</b>	<b>56%</b>		

Increase in charter school payments as a percent of Foundation Aid increase (NYC only) 72%  
 Increase in charter school payments as a percent of Foundation Aid increase (all 21 Districts) 61%

In New York city, during this same five-year period, Foundation Aid increased by \$1.5 billion, whereas charter school tuition payments increased by \$1.1 billion. As a result, 72 percent of the Foundation Aid increase in New York City over the past five years had to be used to pay for the increase in charter school tuition payments.

When looking at all twenty-one districts during this five-year period a similar pattern arises where Foundation Aid increased by \$2.0 billion and total charter school tuition payments increased by \$1.2 billion. Let me do the math for you, that is over 60 percent of the increase in Foundation Aid for these districts that had to be used to pay for the growth in charter school tuition payments.

The state should not continue to force school districts to absorb the fiscal impact of charter schools in their community at the expense of neighborhood schools that continue to educate many at-risk students.

You have worked so hard and so long, you have been on the Million Dollar Staircase with our members, you have visited your local neighborhood public schools to deliver education funding and Foundation Aid, only to have it usurped by charter school operators who serve a fraction of the children that are served by the neighborhood public schools.

### **Local Control in Approving Charter School Applications**

Charter operators are exempt from the transparency and accountability requirements that are required of public schools. School boards are publicly elected, and their budgets are voted on by the community. However, the same community that votes on the budget and body overseeing public schools has no voice or say on whether a charter school is established in their school district.

We have seen many situations, some recent, where a charter application was approved against the objections of the community and the New York State Board of Regents. On December 13, 2021, the Regents' P-12 Education Committee recommended that proposed charter applications in Wyandanch and Central Islip be abandoned. The Regents was unable to establish how approval of these two schools would improve student learning and achievement, among other items, as outlined in section 2850 of the education law. There was also significant community opposition to the proposed charter schools. Despite the Board of Regents' opposition and community objections, under current law, the SUNY Board of Trustees has the authority to approve charter schools. It is a NYSUT legislative priority that the New York State Board of Regents should be the final arbiter, when approving or disapproving charter schools.

Given the fiscal, programmatic, and educational impact on the school district and students, the district should be given a voice in the approval process as well as any subsequent renewal, modification, supplement or revision to a charter application.

NYSUT urges the Legislature to reject the executive budget proposals to modify the cap and reissue revoked or suspended charters. Additionally, we urge the Legislature to enact legislative measures to protect public school districts and their students from the financial harm caused by the establishment of charter schools. NYSUT urges the Legislature to enact provisions to provide that before any charter school can open, the local school board must approve their application

### **BOCES/Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

While we are appreciative that the 2023-24 executive budget invests \$10 million over two years for school districts, BOCES and community colleges to work with local industry to develop strategic workforce plans that promote job readiness, more needs to be done to expand access to critical CTE programs.



Statewide, CTE programs provide students with a rigorous, career-aligned learning experience. Students who graduate from these programs are prepared to pursue a four-year college degree or immediately enter the workforce. These programs must remain current and relevant, because as workforce and economic trends change, businesses will require skilled workers to fill these positions. For several years, there have been statewide increases in the number of students enrolled in CTE programs.

The current aid formula for BOCES CTE programs has not changed since 1990, and the state only provides aid for the first \$30,000 of a BOCES instructor’s salary. The example below illustrates the financial constraints of the law.

Year	Average BOCES Teacher’s Salary	Aid Ratio	Local Share
1990	\$30,000	A district with a 60 percent Aid Ratio received $\$30,000 \times .6 = \$18,000$ in BOCES aid.	\$12,000
2023	\$60,000	Same district still gets $\$30,000 \times .6 = \$18,000$ in BOCES Aid	\$42,000
The effective aid ratio is not 60 percent — it is 30 percent.			

Changes to the BOCES formula would make BOCES services more attractive to school districts by covering a reasonable share of the cost of programs and services districts purchase.

Furthermore, Special Services Aid for the Big 5 and other non-component districts is capped. These factors, in effect, reduce state support for CTE programs by shifting these costs to local schools, resulting in the underinvestment of high-quality programs that have proven to provide students with the skills employer’s demand.

NYSUT urges the Legislature to enact S.919 (Mayer)/A.5190 (Benedetto) of 2022, which will sustain and expand high-quality BOCES programs, including CTE programs, throughout the state and increase the special services aid per pupil formula funding cap. In addition, the Legislature should include ninth grade in special services aid for the Big 5 districts.

### **Special Schools**

NYSUT members work in Special Act, 853 and 4201 Schools, as well as 4410 Programs throughout our state — educating and working with some of the most medically and socially/emotionally frail students in our communities. The students that are served by these schools and programs cannot be served by traditional neighborhood schools. The dedicated educators who work in these settings, and their students, require additional services and resources.

We are extremely grateful for your partnership and advocacy and the governor’s approval of an 11 percent rate increase for Special Act and 853 Schools and 4410 Programs and look forward to a sustained growth in the rate to assist the educators that work with these students. NYSUT is also supportive of the \$2.5 million appropriation in the executive budget proposal to study and fix the current outdated and cumbersome rate methodology system.

NYSUT is also advocating for an additional \$20 million for Excessive Teacher Turnover Grants (ETTG), which are available to certain educators that work in these schools. We also urge you to establish a Direct Care Support Turnover Grant, and fund it at \$40 million, which would be available to support staff, such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and other titles, who work with students.

## **4201 Schools**

The executive budget proposes a \$2 million operational reduction for 4201 Schools. NYSUT stands ready to advocate with you and your colleagues in the Legislature to restore this cut to the operational growth of 4201 Schools and to ensure that these students benefit from a similar increase in their funding, as was seen by other special education programs and schools that serve students who attend specialized educational settings. These students deserve parity with their fellow students, no matter what school they attend.

NYSUT is also joining with the 4201 Schools Association in advocating for the funding of an educator and direct care retention grant, funded at \$30 million, so that these incredibly important schools can attract and retain the educators and therapists they need.

## **Teacher Centers**

Teacher Centers were established by the Legislature to provide comprehensive, ongoing professional development and support services to educators. They are the only state-funded vehicle which support teacher professional development in school districts, including over 200 high-need schools/districts, BOCES, non-public and charter schools.

These centers create programs and content to address emerging trends and needs. For example, they have created programming that focuses on the social/emotional well-being of students, parents/caregivers, teachers and school staff. The impact of trauma and stress of the COVID-19 pandemic on both teaching and learning cannot be ignored.

These centers provide many other programs to support educators, school related professionals and parents. Some programs include: providing professional development to train mentors who will support new teachers; offering workshops specifically for parents to introduce them to the technology that their children are using and strategies to help their children with learning; robotic coding and technology; 3D science training; content knowledge in pre-k through 12 learning standards; and creating programs to support struggling learners, special education teachers, students with disabilities and English language learners.

The executive budget eliminates \$21.4 million in funding for the Teacher Centers. We urge you to restore funding for Teacher Centers to 2022-23 level of \$40 million so we can continue to support the state's educators, improve student achievement, and provide them with the tools necessary to educate students.

## **Many Threads One Fabric**

Over the past two years, because of your support, the budget has included money for our union-led implicit bias training called “Many Threads One Fabric,” to members of NYSUT. Today, I would like to ask for your continued support for this very important program and this year, fund this training at \$2 million, so that we may continue with our goal of providing this training to each and every member of NYSUT.

## **Alternative Approaches**

The executive budget provides \$3 million for the restorative practices grant to provide for alternative approaches to student discipline. These funds have been reappropriated four times but no request for proposals has ever been issued on this grant. We believe this money should be directed to the expansion of the Positive Learning Collaborative outside of New York City, which is run by the United Federation of Teachers. This model has a proven track record of improving school climate and has reduced suspensions and increased student attendance. We would love the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss this program and its results in further detail.

## **Human Service Providers**

NYSUT supports the executive budget proposal for the 2.5 percent COLA for human service providers who contract with a variety of state agencies to care for New Yorkers. NYSUT represents a number of ARCs and other human service provider staff in the Western New York area, and we are pleased to see these dedicated staff receive proper, well-deserved compensation.

## **Transfer of Oversight**

I wanted to take a moment to share NYSUT’s opposition to the executive budget proposals to transfer the Empire State After-School Program from SED to the Office of Children and Family Services and, for licensed health care professionals, from SED to the Department of Health. In the case of the after-school program, SED is the lead entity setting educational policy and has the knowledge and experience to work with schools. In the case of health care professionals, SED houses the Office of the Professions and works diligently to ensure that those trained in their professional field are properly trained and credentialed and that they are adhering to the highest ethical standards. SED’s infrastructure of Boards overseeing each profession and role with accreditation, involvement with higher education programs, is uniquely positioned to oversee and the full continuum of needs of the professions, from educational preparation to ongoing professional development and compliance with licensure/certification requirements.

## **Conclusion**

I want to thank you. In 2009, I came to Albany and started talking with you about the need to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula to ensure that our schools had the basic funding they needed to provide every student with a quality education. Today, we stand in view of the finish line of that journey we started so long ago. We must ensure that Foundation Aid is not eroded or diverted to other purposes. We can now begin to address the needs of our students and the future of education in New York state. NYSUT stands ready to partner with you as you begin your work on this year’s state budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I will now turn it over to Karen Alford, Vice President of Elementary Schools with the United Federation of Teachers.