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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

1 Academy Park • Albany, New York 12207
(518) 475-6010 • Fax: (518) 475-6014

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City School District of Albany 2020-21 Legislative Priorities

- **Equitable Foundation Aid funding**
 - The focus that Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature have placed in recent years on providing additional assistance to high-needs districts is the right thing to do for students and families statewide. Our district receives only about 75% of our Foundation Aid funding, and only 45% of our total budget comes from state aid. This is a significantly lower percentage than other similar Upstate New York school districts – for example, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Schenectady, Troy and Utica all receive 58% to 81% of their funding through state aid. We are requesting an increase in our state aid to 55% for 2020-21. We also urge our state leaders to continue to focus on funding equity by re-evaluating the formula without consolidating or capping certain aid categories.
 - In Albany, this inequity is exacerbated by the fact that more than 60% of our city's property is tax-exempt, much of it due to our role as New York's Capital City. In re-evaluating the Foundation Aid formula, we ask that the state build in a new factor that considers the percentage of tax-exempt property within a community.
- **Support for expanded Child Safety Zone transportation criteria**
 - Transportation is a critical tool for addressing chronic absenteeism, which is a leading indicator of low student performance. The state's transportation law currently limits our ability to provide bus service for many children who do not have a safe route to walk to school because the criteria for Child Safety Zones does not account for crime rates and the density of vacant buildings. The Assembly and Senate have legislation pending that would address this matter (A7242/S5719). We ask for your support in passing this legislation and adopting the necessary regulatory changes.
- **Equitable prekindergarten funding for high-needs urban school districts**
 - We offer 1,025 prekindergarten seats for 3-year-old and 4-year-olds. However, the pre-K funding formula penalizes districts like Albany that were early implementers of full-day pre-K more than a decade ago. More than half of our seats (552) continue to be funded at the old UPK base allocation of \$4,105, less than half of some current pre-K streams. We strongly advocate raising our funding for those 552 seats to be equitable with more recent funding streams, such as EPK (\$7,882). This would provide our district with an additional \$2.1 million. That would offset our own annual General Fund investment (\$1.3 million in the current year), which is necessary to sustain our pre-K offerings. It also would support

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VISION STATEMENT

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

MISSION STATEMENT

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

investments to attract and retain high-quality, certified pre-K teachers, offering our youngest learners an even stronger foundation as they begin their academic journey.

- **Additional support to address unintended consequences of Raise the Age**
 - We fully support raising the age of criminal responsibility. The state's efforts to raise the age and implement other measures including Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS), Bail and Discovery reforms are the right thing to do. However, as an unintended consequence, school districts like ours have had a dramatic increase in justice-involved students. Those students need additional services, and our district needs support to provide those services so that we can do our part to ensure that these reforms will have a positive impact on our students and families. For 2020-21, we request an additional \$500,000 to fund positions that are critical to providing the supports our justice-involved students need, including social workers, behavior specialists, guidance counselors and school psychologists.

- **Support for English as a New Language and refugee students**
 - Our ENL enrollment has more than tripled in the past six years to nearly 1,300, about 11% of total enrollment. Our students represent more than 55 countries and speak 49 languages, and we are deeply committed to our English-language learners (ELLs) and their families. In recent years we have invested more than \$2.2 million to address these needs and meet the mandated requirements of CR Part 154. We urge the state to provide additional support for districts like ours that have large ENL and refugee enrollments, and have demonstrated the initiative to invest in unique supports for this often-fragile student population.

- **Continued investments in Community Schools**
 - Our district is a strong advocate for sustained Community Schools funding, and we are grateful to Governor Cuomo for proposing an increase in our Community Schools aid for 2020-21. With the support of Community Schools funding, we have been more able to engage students and families in meaningful ways. Together with our community partners we are expanding afterschool academic and enrichment programs, as well as medical, dental, mental health and social services. We are advocating that Community Schools funding be considered categorical aid separate from our Foundation Aid. We appreciate the state's continued support for Community Schools investments.

- **Amend New York's voting law to address the provision allowing three hours off from work**
 - On Nov. 5 – Election Day – 511 district employees exercised their right to take three hours off to vote – about 30% of our total workforce. As a result, we are planning for half-days of instruction on April 28 and June 23 – the latter being a day of Regents testing for high school students – due to the potential of absences that would far exceed our capacity to provide substitutes. We urge our state leaders to support S5314/A7837, which would amend this well-intended provision of the voting law.