

TESTIMONY

**Joint Legislative Hearing of the
Assembly Ways and Means Committee
&
Senate Finance Committee
On
Executive Budget Proposals for Education
SFY 2016-17**



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The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators

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Good afternoon, Senator Marcellino, Senator Young, Assemblyman Farrell, Assemblyman Nolan, and distinguished guests. I extend congratulations to Senators Young and Marcellino on their appointments as chairs of the Finance Committee and Education Committees, and look forward to working with you in the days ahead...

My name is Ernest Logan and I am President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) the labor union representing 6,100 active and 10,000 retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Administrators and Supervisors working in New York City public schools and conversion charter schools. CSA is also the collective bargaining unit for 200 Early Childhood Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Early Childhood Education Centers.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the State Fiscal Year 2016-17 Executive Budget.

Let me begin by thanking you, the Governor, the Governor's Common Core Task Force, the Board of Regents and the State Education Department for the recent changes in state regulations which removed the over-reliance on testing of our school children in teacher and principal performance reviews. The Governor's Task Force appropriately involved stakeholders in the public education field, and has recommended important changes based on their expert input. We are also encouraged by the Governor's willingness to involve public education stakeholders in future policy proposals. We appreciate and are encouraged by the overall positive message of the Executive Budget proposal this year with respect to public school students, teachers and school administrators. However, we believe more must be done and additional state aid must be provided in order to close the student achievement gap and to attain the State's goal of ensuring that all children are college and career-ready upon graduation. To that end, CSA recommends that state policy makers provide the financial resources the Regents and State Education Department require fulfilling their mission.

FOUNDATION AID and GAP ELIMINATION ADJUSTMENT (GEA)— Like so many education advocates you will hear from today, CSA believes that the \$2.1 billion increase over two years proposed in the Executive Budget is not sufficient for our State’s public schools. In SFY 2016-17, the Governor has proposed a total school aid increase of \$991 million. Foundation Aid is proposed to increase by \$266 million, only a 1.68% increase, while GEA would be funded at \$189 million. In our view, the absolute first priority should be to meet the state’s obligation to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit and the state’s designated formula to address the legal mandate resulting from this case.

Foundation Aid is intended to support all school districts, most importantly low-income school districts. While it is imperative to fund school districts with appropriate GEA restoration funding to meet their needs, fully funding Foundation Aid must be our top priority.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL AID and RECEIVERSHIPS — CSA supports Governor Cuomo’s proposed \$100 million for Community Schools and support Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina’s efforts to improve struggling schools through their Renewal Schools program. CSA supports appropriate professional development of teachers and school administrators, as well as the use of innovative education policy models at these community schools.

While we disagree with certain aspects of the implementation of the Renewal Schools Program, the concept is visionary and our members are proud to be part of these efforts. We firmly believe, given appropriate time, the Renewal School program will be the solution for schools that are “struggling” or “persistently struggling.”

Adequately funding Renewal/Community schools recognizes that the problems these institutions face are largely based on societal issues outside the school building.

School children must come to school ready to learn. But we must recognize the limitations many of our students unfortunately face every day. Community schools are meant to address many of these issues, including poverty, homelessness, poor home environment, poor dental health, nutrition and other issues. We are confident that these schools will begin to show and sustain concrete results.

In the current fiscal year, the Governor and Legislature added \$75 million to support 20 persistently struggling schools. We thank you. Yet the proposal for next year is to spend only \$100 million for 124 struggling and persistently struggling schools. We recommend that an appropriate amount be budgeted for all 124 schools.

It is imperative that stakeholders are actively involved in proposed solutions to help struggling schools. The Governor and Legislature are now embracing community schools as a solution. We thank you. However, new services provided to students will take time to implement. Progress will not happen overnight, or, for that matter, in twelve months. Persistently struggling schools need more than a year – and some more than two years - to reap the benefits of Community school concepts and services. We recommend they receive the same four year evaluation period recently extended to APPR and the impact of Common Core testing on our students.

We recommend the same four year evaluation period be applied to struggling and persistently struggling schools before the State considers moving these schools into receivership. Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina have provided financial resources to renewal schools, identified areas in need of improvement in these schools and provided intensive support. CSA is confident that these schools will begin to show and sustain concrete positive results over time.

MAYORAL CONTROL - CSA supports the continuation of mayoral control of New York City's public schools.

CHARTER SCHOOLS – CSA represents a number of unionized conversion charter schools. We support the Governor's proposal to provide an additional \$27 million in per-pupil grants to charter schools to further their development, the unfreezing of the charter school formula in NYC, and making permanent the calculation of rental aid for NYC charter schools.

We also support a new category of support: Conversion Charter School Supplemental Aid. Our unionized charter schools continue to bear "legacy" costs that date from pre-conversion. Our charter school members report that pension and health insurance costs have risen dramatically in recent years, and can now comprise 12% to 22% of each school's operating budget. These

costs are not covered under the charter school funding process, and financial relief is urgently needed.

DREAM ACT - CSA strongly supports enactment of the “DREAM Act” to continue New York's legacy of educational support for immigrant youth who attend P-12 public schools. We support allowing immigrant students to apply for state financial aid for higher education.

PARENTAL CHOICE in EDUCATION ACT – Last year, a similar proposal, the “Education Investment Tax Credit,” came before the Legislature. While the name of the proposal has been altered slightly this year, it is still bad policy. In fact, some provisions may be unconstitutional. CSA opposes the legislation again this year. This measure would divert at least \$150 million from public schools and services while at the same time underfunding Foundation Aid by more than \$4 billion.

Providing a tax credit to wealthy individuals by granting up to a \$750,000 tax credit for donations up to \$1 million diverts revenue from the state at the same time that public schools remain significantly underfunded.

CSA can offer qualified support for the Governor’s proposal to establish a tax credit for the cost of instructional supplies purchased by an educator, if such credit eligibility also includes purchases made by principals. But it must be said that the entire discussion of tax credits would be unnecessary if public schools were appropriately funded.

EMPIRE STATE PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM for THREE-YEAR-OLDS—CSA supports the Governor’s proposal to use \$22 million to establish Pre-K for three year olds. When combined with the community school initiative, educating at-risk Pre-K children will help ameliorate the education gap among our disadvantaged students.

QUALITY Stars NY—CSA supports the fundamental concept that the state should only support high-quality Pre-k programs. CSA agrees that all programs should be audited for quality assessment and cost efficiency. However, CSA believes that oversight responsibility for all education programs is best retained within the State Education Department (SED) and that

oversight should not be established through a three-member panel in the State Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS), as proposed in the Executive Budget.

SCHOOL SAFETY— CSA supports the Executive Budget proposal to extend funding school safety expenses incurred into 2015-16, and to implement school safety reforms. However, we also stress and underscore that Principals know what safety measures best fit their institutions and must be intimately involved in the development of school-based safety plans.

SCHOOL LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The role and work of instructional leaders has become even more crucial in recent years as policymakers have focused on supporting student achievement and eliminating college and career readiness gaps among our youth.

To ensure that school leaders successfully manage and meet ongoing challenges as well as succeed as instructional leaders, New York State must provide our Principal and Assistant Principals with access to ongoing professional development. The research-based literature related to effective schools and student achievement has long acknowledged the critical role of Principals in providing school leadership that will shape a highly complex organization into a cohesive and collaborative learning community.

A number of years ago, CSA established the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), a not-for-profit organization designed to deliver practical, relevant and essential professional development for today's school leaders. ELI provides standards-based, results-driven leadership training to help school leaders successfully fulfill their instructional responsibilities. We need to invest in more of this kind of high-level training and support. ELI's programs give school leaders the tools they need to create true learning communities.

We are grateful for the Legislature's support of ELI in the FY 2015-2016 state budget. This funding has provided much needed professional development services and mentoring to school leaders working in New York City public schools. ELI works with other professional organizations to provide professional development for Long Island and Upstate school administrators as well. With your help and support, ELI's programs can grow, providing standards-based, high quality

and results-driven leadership training to a variety of school administrators. We ask for your continued support of this important work.

Finally, we support several other major proposals contained elsewhere in the Executive Budget, including extending the state's MWBE policy goals to contracts funded at the local level, paid family leave, and increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

Conclusion - Our students deserve the best; we must provide them with the programs, services and support necessary to prepare them not only for college and careers, but for life.

New York State will be successful in educating our students only when we take the time to discuss, plan, implement and provide the necessary resources to our students. During the upcoming budget negotiations, we urge the Legislature to continue to advocate for students, teachers and school leaders.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

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