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TESTIMONY

School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS)

**Presented to
Assembly Ways & Means Committee
&
Senate Finance Committee**

**Joint Hearing on
Education Proposals of the SFY 2016-2017
Executive Budget**

**January 27, 2016
Albany, New York**

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairpersons Farrell, Young, Nolan and Marcellino. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony concerning the education proposals contained in the Executive Budget for fiscal year 2016-2017.

My name is James Viola and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State. SAANYS is the largest state professional association of school administrators, with membership exceeding 7,000. On behalf of our principals, assistant principals, supervisors, deans and many others, I thank you for your continued advocacy and support for public education. We also applaud you for recognizing the critical importance of school leadership in our public schools.

Our school leaders work indefatigably to provide quality education programs and services to their students. The importance of their work is quantified in a study published in the winter 2013 edition of *Education Next*. Researchers found that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between 0.05 and 0.21 standard deviations – equating to two to seven months of additional learning per year. The effectiveness of administrators' work is reflected in continued improvement in the graduation rate published by the State Education Department: 78.1 percent in four years, with increasing rates of success posted for all Big Five city school districts and for school districts in every Need/Resource Category. New York State was also included in the Quality Counts 2016 listing of top 10 states for "Overall Grades and Scores."

State School Aid

We are grateful for the release of school district budget runs following Governor Cuomo's presentation of his Executive Budget. Many school districts begin planning for the next year's budget now. They rely upon the DOB runs for authoritative information to plan for their revenues and to calculate their property tax cap by the March 1 deadline. This information is essential for meaningful community engagement and for 2016-17 school district budget planning.

Governor Cuomo proposes a \$2.1 billion increase in school aid over a two-year period, with an increase of \$991 million in 2016-17. However, based on other severely restricted revenues (such as the property tax cap) and escalating costs (such as health insurance), the New York State Educational Conference Board

(ECB) has calculated that an increase of \$1.7 billion is needed in 2016-17 just to continue current programs. In fact, the manner in which aid is allocated based on the proposed Executive Budget will result in state aid reductions for many school districts, including the following local examples:

School District	2015-16	2016-17	Decrease
• East Greenbush	\$29 million	\$ 27.3 million	5.76%
• Schodack	\$7.4	\$7.2	3.25
• Duanesburg	\$7.0	\$6.8	3.11
• Mohonasen	\$20.0	\$19.6	2.16
• North Colonie	\$19.4	\$19.0	2.00
• Guilderland	\$2.4	\$2.3	1.14
• Green Island	\$3.4	\$3.3	0.68
• Schuylerville	\$15.9	\$15.8	0.43
• Schalmont	\$13.3	\$13.2	0.23

Governor Cuomo, members of the State Legislature and SAANYS are not satisfied with the status quo in terms of student performance and educational outcomes. Since 2007, school districts have been asked to do more with less, in implementing many unfunded and underfunded mandates in an uncoordinated manner, and within rushed timeframes with diminished state and local support. No enterprise can achieve excellent results under such circumstances. Despite the markedly improved and improving state economy, school districts are still recovering from the loss of 30,000 educators (with a proportionately greater loss of school administrators than teachers), are working to right-size class sizes and to provide needed support to educators and students – with the goal of improving educational results and increasing the proportion of graduates who are college and career ready.

Today, still, 31 percent of school districts receive less aid than in 2009-10 and all districts face unavoidable increased costs such as salary increases (2.7 percent) and health insurance costs (6.6 percent). And the needed fiscal support that New York State has committed to provide for the availability of a sound basic education for each student continues to be withheld from schools. The Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) still diverts from schools \$434 million and current Foundation Aid is underfunded by \$4.4 billion – this is money owed to school districts. Adding to school districts' fiscal burden is the property tax cap, with a cap of 0.12% for 2016-17 – far below the general public's understanding of a two

percent cap. With this in mind, SAANYS recommends a **\$2.2 billion increase in state aid for 2016-17, with \$1.7 billion to continue current educational programs and services, and \$5 million for targeted initiatives to better support students and educators and improve educational outcomes.** Such initiatives include: expanding universal prekindergarten, support to Failing Schools, support for the provision of services to English language learners, and expanding access to college and career pathways.

The Gap Elimination Adjustment must be phased-out now. The GEA was implemented by former Governor David Paterson as a short-term mechanism to balance the state budget during the Great Recession. Governor Cuomo proposes to spend down the GEA over a two-year period: \$189 million in 2016-17, \$245 million in 2017-18. **SAANYS recommends that the full \$434 million owed to schools under the GEA be included in the state aid budget for 2016-17.**

The Foundation Aid Formula was enacted in 2007 in order to ensure the sustainable allocation of adequate school funding to each school district for the provision of quality educational services to all students. Currently, Foundation Aid is underfunded by \$4.4 billion, with more than 75 percent (\$3.4 billion) of the Foundation Aid shortfall owed to high need school districts, including the 17 school districts in which Failing and Persistently Failing Schools are located. SAANYS recommends:

1. After ending the GEA and funding expense-based aids, the remainder of the increase in unrestricted aid should be distributed through Foundation Aid.
2. Establish a concrete timeline to fully phase-in Foundation Aid.
3. Reexamine some of the underlying assumptions that underpin the formula.

The Property Tax Cap has exacerbated the gap in educational opportunities available to students in high-need and in low-need school districts. For 2014-15 and 2015-16 the cap was well under two percent (1.46 and 1.62 respectively), but for 2016-17 the cap is set very far below the two percent level understood by the general public – at .012 percent. In a January 20, 2016 NEWS memorandum issued by the Office of the New York State Comptroller, it is estimated that for 2016-17, the state's school districts (excluding the Big Five city school districts) will have approximately \$308 million less in levy growth compared to what they had in 2015-16. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said, "This nearly zero growth in the tax cap will limit budget options for school (districts)" and require that they "...take a hard look at operations to find ways to cut costs." In that the

calculation of the cap limit is set in statute, it is all the more imperative that an adequate allocation of state aid be set for 2016-17 – necessitating an increase of \$2.2 billion. SAANYS also recommends the following revisions of the property tax cap procedures and calculations:

- The tax cap is more restrictive for school districts (requiring affirmation by a 60 percent supermajority of voters) than for other local governmental entities (requiring affirmation by a 60 percent supermajority of board members, many times comprised of 5 members). It is recommended that the statute be revised to require a majority (not 60 percent supermajority) vote to exceed the property tax cap.
- In order to provide school districts a more consistent basis for fiscal planning, set the tax cap at a fixed 2 percent increase level.

Tax Credit Programs included in the Executive Budget would divert \$300 million from the General Fund that should be used to support public schools and other public services. **SAANYS recommends that the following programs NOT be funded:**

- **Parent Choice in Education Act -- \$150 million**
- **The Education Scholarship and Program Tax Credit -- \$70 million**
- **The Family Choice Education Tax Credit -- \$70 million**
- **The Instructional Materials and Supplies Credit -- \$10 million**

New York State has a constitutional obligation to provide a sound basic education to our students and the public school system is the mechanism through which we meet this obligation. Moreover, the state constitution prohibits direct or indirect financial aid to private schools that are under the control of a religious denomination or where religious tenants are taught. Public schools are available to all students; private schools, where available, are a choice for parents.

English Language Learner (including more than 8,000 unaccompanied minors) enrollment is increasing in New York State and now exceeds 213,000 students in 2015-16 (based on SED data), who speak more than 200 languages. Their academic performance has improved modestly, but there is a substantial gap compared to the performance of non-ELL students. This is not the fault of the students, nor is it the fault of school districts. The preponderance of the new unfunded requirements set in Part 154 of commissioner's regulations to better identify and meet the needs of ELL students, including required professional development for all educational personnel, went into effect this school year and constitute a substantial new fiscal burden for many school districts – especially

for those with large increases in the arrival of unaccompanied minors for whom school districts could not have planned and budgeted. In order to provide sufficient support for the implementation of necessary ELL services and programs, **SAANYS recommends the establishment of a new English Language Learner formula aid category with an allocation of \$75 million** to ensure that districts are able to provide services to English language learners that are commensurate and more appropriate to their needs. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) aid (which was eliminated in 2007 during the development of the Foundation Aid formula) should be re-established with a .20 weighting for each enrolled ELL student. **SAANYS supports the ELL aid proposal adopted by the State Education Department, which is also necessary to address the influx of immigrant students.**

Unaccompanied Minors continue to enroll in schools after program planning and budget development. Today, more than 8,000 unaccompanied minors have been placed with sponsors and are attending New York State schools.

Districts with 50 or More Unaccompanied Minors

County	2014	2015	Total
Bronx	495	174	669
Kings	535	281	816
Nassau	1446	486	1932
New York	77	0	77
Orange	74	0	74
Putnam	54	0	54
Queens	902	506	1408
Rockland	232	124	356
Suffolk	1600	637	2237
Westchester	322	221	543
Total	5737	2429	8166

In many cases, students have had their formal education interrupted and may arrive at schools with social and emotional needs, as well as educational needs. Schools welcome these students but do not have the necessary resources (funding, staff, programs, etc.) to meet the needs of such students, and are unable to predict how many students will be enrolling. **SAANYS recommends \$10 million in Emergency Aid and Growth Aid be allocated to school districts during the current year to address the needs of incoming students.**

Summary of Recommendations and Positions Regarding State School Aid

- **State School Aid – The proposed school aid increase is insufficient. SAANYS Recommends** an increase of \$2.2 billion in 2016-17 in order to more adequately support school districts in implementing the many mandates associated with the state education reform agenda. An increase of \$1.7 billion is essential in order to avoid the further erosion of our educational system.

- **Gap Elimination Adjustment / Foundation Aid – SAANYS Recommends** that the Gap Elimination Adjustment be phased-out through an allocation of \$434 million, and that Foundation Aid be increased in a balanced and proportionate manner, with increased state aid allocations for all school districts. It is also recommended that appropriate adjustments be made to the Foundation Aid formula and a timeline set for full funding. The 17 school districts in which Failing Schools and Persistently Failing Schools are located should be prioritized for full phase-in of Foundation Aid.

- **Property Tax Cap – SAANYS Recommends** that the property tax cap be discontinued in favor of a circuit breaker tax relief system. At the very least, Property Tax Cap requirements should be amended to:
 1. Revise the override requirement so that, in addition to a “basic budget” that stays within the cap, school districts would be permitted to present to the voters a separate ballot question for a majority (not a super majority) vote, similar to Massachusetts and New Jersey.
 2. Revise the restrictive 0 percent contingency cap for school districts to the lesser of 2 percent or the tax levy in the basic budget proposed to voters.
 3. Make the allowable tax growth factor a consistent 2 percent, regardless of CPI.

- **Education Tax Credit Programs -- SAANYS Opposes funding for:**
 - Parental Choice in Education Act (\$150 million)
 - Education Scholarship and Program Tax Credit (\$70 million)
 - Family Choice Education Tax Credit (\$70 million)
 - Instructional Materials and Supplies Credit (\$10 million)

- **Emergency Aid and On-going Funding Growth Aid – SAANYS Recommends** that \$10 million be allocated to school districts during the current year to address the needs of incoming students. **SAANYS further Recommends** that Growth Aid be triggered for increases in enrollment above 0.04 percent (i.e., the previous trigger). Once the enrollments in affected districts increase by four-tenths of one percent, they would receive increased aid based on the Foundation Aid formula.
- **Aid for English Language Learners – SAANYS Recommends** the allocation of \$75 million for a categorical formula-based program (.20 weighting) to support the provision of services to English language learners, without any trigger.
- **Settlement Funds – SAANYS Recommends** that a portion of the approximately \$1.5 billion in non-recurring legal settlement funds be used to address the following:
 - The provision of professional development to teachers and school administrators for implementation of common core pedagogy, oversight systems, and pacing and instructional tools.
 - Payment of existing school aid liabilities (prior year adjustments).
 - School district voting machines, to comply with recent statutory revisions requiring the purchase of optical scanning voting machines to replace the old lever machines.
 - Acceleration of prekindergarten funding payments so that districts are not required to pay for the majority of the first year before receiving any state funds.
- **BOCES Aid for CTE Pathways Programs –** The State Board of Regents acted to approve Multiple Pathways for High School Graduation, effective with the 2015-16 school year. Since 1992 the instructional salaries eligible for BOCES Aid has remained \$30,000. This flat reimbursement amount has not kept pace with actual costs to employ well-prepared teachers and likely has resulted in lessening the ability of school districts to send their students to these programs. **SAANYS Recommends** that the aidable salary for high quality BOCES CTE programs be doubled over the next five years, with 20 percent of the gap funded for services provided in 2016-17, and 20 percent annually for next four subsequent years. It is also recommended that special services aid for CTE Pathways programs operated by the Big Five and non-component districts should be commensurately increased over a five-year period.

Other SAANYS Positions Regarding Executive Budget Proposals

Annual Professional Performance Reviews – SAANYS recognizes and appreciates the outreach of Governor Cuomo’s Common Core Task Force in conducting public sessions and encouraging the submission of written recommendations upon which twenty-one recommendations were based. Recommendation 21, pertaining to the state annual professional performance review system, appropriately established a four-year safeguard, so that the “assessments aligned to the Common Core Standards, as well as the updated standards, shall only be advisory.” SAANYS also recognizes and appreciates the timely manner in which emergency regulations were adopted by the Board of Regents to implement the Task Force recommendation. But these actions constitute an imperfect “patch” of the APPR system, and do not address the full identification and implementation of needed amendments to statute and regulation. In addition to the current instruments and methodology used for producing state-provided growth scores, other aspects of the current system warrant examination and possible revision, such as the weighting of the Student Performance and Observation Categories in the “matrix” used to yield composite ratings, and whether the fiscal and administrative burden associated with the second observation by an “impartial independent trained evaluator or evaluator selected by the district” is justified in relation to the information produced. **SAANYS recommends that the Governor’s office, members of the State Legislature and the State Education Department use this time to continue to engage with appropriate stakeholders to determine what is working in the current APPR system and what is not working so that the next revisions to the system are identified in an informed, thoughtful manner and so that the system may be implemented in a stable, cohesive manner. SAANYS pledges to be available to work with you to the full extent possible.**

Failing Schools and Persistently Failing Schools – On October 14, 2015, SAANYS presented testimony at an Assembly Education Committee Hearing titled “Chronically Struggling Schools and School Receivership.” At this hearing SAANYS recommended that the current statute and regulations regarding Failing Schools and Persistently Failing Schools (a.k.a., Struggling Schools and Persistently Struggling Schools) be re-written. SAANYS continues to recommend that §211-f of Education Law and §100.19 of regulations be revised to reflect a four-part strategy:

1. Provide the school districts in which such schools are located with their full, if not enhanced allocations under the Foundation Aid Formula.

2. Prioritize and support such schools for the establishment of community schools.
3. Prioritize and support the school districts within which these schools are located for the establishment of full-day prekindergarten programs.
4. Appoint an education expert who has been mutually vetted and selected by the State Education Department and the school district to work on-site with school leadership on a multi-year basis to establish systems and targeted initiatives.

However, within the current framework of statutes, regulations and procedures, adjustments are necessary in order set fair and realistic expectations and conditions for improvement.

Fiscal Support – All 17 school districts in which the 144 Failing and Persistently Failing Schools are located are high poverty and are under-funded in terms of state aid. Together they are owed \$2.7 billion in Foundation Aid. In order to implement receivership provisions, no additional fiscal support (\$0) has been designated for the 124 Failing Schools leaving the Superintendent Receiver with no option other than to re-allocate funds, personnel and other needed resources from other schools in the district, in a “rob Peter to pay Paul manner” – and SAANYS has received information from school districts that this is indeed occurring. **SAANYS recommends** that \$75 million in additional categorical aid be allocated to Failing Schools to implement related procedures and initiatives without adverse impact upon other schools or the school district. Such additional funding should continue to be allocated for each year the school remains in such status and implements its SED-approved improvement plan with fidelity.

In 2015, \$75 million was allocated for a two-year period (2015-16 and 2016-17) for Persistently Failing Schools, with the statute requiring that the funds be released in July 2015. In reality, Persistently Failing Schools received no part of these funds until mid-January – more than seven months late and with more than half the school year elapsed. **SAANYS recommends** that the \$75 million allocation be extended to 2017-18 and that appropriate action be taken to ensure the timely release of such funds in 2016-17. It is also recommended that additional funding should continue to be allocated for each year the school remains in such status and implements its SED-approved improvement plan with fidelity.

Accountability – There are no quick, simple solutions to improving school performance. The idea of substantially closing the achievement gap in a Priority School within a two-year period is unrealistic and not supported by research.

Moreover, the prospect of closing the gap within less than one year, largely without any additional resources, in a school that has performed at a Priority School level for a decade or more is all the more unrealistic. **SAANYS recommends** that the timeframe within which progress is to be demonstrated should be extended to at least five years.

In light of the extraordinarily untimely manner in which “mandated” funding was provided to Persistently Failing Schools, **SAANYS recommends** that in determining whether Persistently Struggling Schools have achieved demonstrable improvement, primary consideration should be directed to the development and implementation of their school improvement plan. In fact, in consideration of the lateness of funding, 2015-16 should be considered a “planning year.”

Changes in school performance should not be considered in a “tunnel vision” manner – focused solely upon the Failing and Persistently Failing Schools. Rather, SAANYS recommends that the performance of Failing / Persistently Failing Schools be completed in juxtaposition to the performance of all other schools in the district from which resources may have been diverted. Will this program be considered successful if the performance of a Failing School improves, but the performance of several other schools within the district worsens?

Community Schools -- SAANYS supports Governor Cuomo’s expressed intention to “transform every Failing School into a Community School.” Pursuant to §211-f, action to establish a Community School “may” be taken by the Superintendent Receiver and “must” be taken by the External Receiver. Community Schools make smart, strategic use of community resources and services to support students. (“Community School” is defined in §100.19 of commissioner’s regulations, see Attachment 1.) However, the establishment of Community Schools entails new and significant recurring costs for personnel, training and operations. There is serious question regarding sustainability for Persistently Failing Schools, for whom the \$75 million allocation is limited to two years; and for other Failing Schools and SED-Targeted schools for whom \$100 million is now proposed for a one-year period. **SAANYS supports** the proposal of \$100 million to support Community School transition in the 17 school districts with Failing and Persistently Failing Schools (\$75 million) and in other high need, low performing school districts to be identified by SED. However, sustainable state and/or federal funding must be identified and available for the ongoing operation of these programs. Such funding should be made available as

a non-mandated categorical resource to targeted schools as an allocation, not as a competitive application.

In addition, SAANYS recommends that capital and transportation expenses related to the establishment and operation of community schools be deemed aidable expenses for transportation and building aid or other state support. Current state building and transportation aid rules include little flexibility for Failing / Persistently Failing Schools wishing to access these expense-based aids to support transformation to a community school. Districts cannot currently construct new buildings, renovate existing buildings or lease space necessary for the provision of community school services; and transportation from home to a facility for tutoring or health services and then back to home is not aidable.

Universal Prekindergarten -- The video presentation that preceded the governor's presentation said, "Prekindergarten should be for all New York State students and that is why the state will pick-up the tab." SAANYS strongly supports such an enhancement of prekindergarten capacity and availability throughout all of New York State, and SAANYS recognizes and is appreciative of the additional \$22 million proposed for prekindergarten services, for children three years of age. BUT prekindergarten is still not equitably available to all children who are four years old and the availability gap is 52.12 percent – with preschool programs available to 82.50 percent of four year old children in New York City and 30.38 percent of four year old children on Long Island.

SAANYS Recommends that the \$22 million proposed to expand prekindergarten to three-year-old students be redirected to prekindergarten programs for students four years of age. **SAANYS Supports** the proposed additional allocation of \$2 million to QUALITYstarsNY to help ensure and promote the provision of quality prekindergarten services. New York State, in addition to preschool special education, now operates six (6) prekindergarten programs but still does not offer "universal" prekindergarten to all four-year-old students, and the governor's proposal would result in the establishment of a seventh competitive grant program. Equitable access to all eligible four-year-old children to quality prekindergarten programs should be in place before expanding the program to children who are three years of age. Eligibility and program requirements, and reporting and reimbursement procedures differ across the existing six programs:

2015-2016

ANTICIPATED and Unduplicated Children Served in State-Funded Prekindergarten Programs

	Funding (in millions)	Participating Districts	Children served in half-day seats	Children served in full-day seats
1&2. UPK (and TPK)	\$386.3	444	11,733	33,472
3. Priority Prek	\$25	25	354	5,646
4. Statewide Universal Full-Day Prek	\$340	60	0	35,319
5. Federal Preschool Expansion Grant	\$25	5	0	1,912
6. expanded 3- and 4- Year Old Prek	\$30	34	448 ⁺	2,847 ⁺
2015-16 Total	\$806.3	453	41,386	79,196

+includes three-year olds in addition to four-year olds.

SAANYS strongly opposes the establishment of the Empire State Prekindergarten Grant Board. The Board, with staff services provided by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), would further fragment and politicize the prekindergarten education system. It appears to be the intent of the proposal to continue with competitive RFPs that will fly in the face of providing sustainable revenues for the provision prekindergarten services and will likely result in the discontinuation of such services in school districts where they have been established. There is no apparent value-added aspect to the establishment of this Board, nor of the rationale underpinning the governor's recommendation. SAANYS strongly recommends that the State Education Department be the lead agency for early childhood, prekindergarten services.

Other Recommendations Regarding Prekindergarten Programs for four-year-old children follow:

- Sunset current prekindergarten programs and provide sufficient state funding so that school districts, other eligible entities that operate UPK programs, and most important – children – are not adversely impacted. Establish one program, with one set of eligibility, program quality standards, data collection/reporting, and budget procedures. Funding should be ensured by inclusion in the Foundation Aid formula or other non-competitive categorical state aid formula – NOT based on competitive grant application and NOT contingent upon annual state budget appropriations.
- State aid should be provided by a method and schedule that is reasonable and appropriate based on prior year child counts reported in April of each year.

- Revise funding procedures so that school districts receive funds upfront in the first quarter of the school year, with ability to drawdown funds on a quarterly basis, as is done for the current Universal Prekindergarten program.
- If there are insufficient funds to support all school districts and other eligible entities, priority consideration and funding should be directed to school districts, especially to school districts with Failing or Persistently Failing Schools for the full availability of prekindergarten services to eligible children. Other eligible entities should not be permitted to apply directly to the State Education Department. All applications should come from and all grants should go to school districts, which then would have the opportunity to collaborate with eligible entities. The programs should be designed and implemented in such a manner as to link success in the prekindergarten program to success in the public school's school age program.
- In instances where prekindergarten programs do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all eligible four-year-old children, a fair and equitable system should be developed for student enrollment. Such determinations should not be made by the Division of Budget based on eight data points.
- Programs should be funded according to a construct of \$10,000 per student. Aid should not be differentiated based on teacher certification. Rather, annual professional performance reviews should be conducted to ensure quality service provision and school districts/other entities should develop plans for quality assurance and staff certification.
- English language learner support should be required for eligible students, with the provision of state aid to school districts.
- Half-Day and full-day options should be maintained on a short-term basis; counting students in full-day programs as 1.0 pupil units and students in half-day programs as 0.5 pupil units. However, the state fiscal formula should be sufficient for, and promote the operation of, full-day programs.
- Transportation costs for students attending prekindergarten should be aidable and such services should be provided in a manner equivalent to students attending school age programs. Currently, transportation services may be provided to prekindergarten students only if existing routes are used and no additional local or state costs are incurred.
- Rental of instructional space should be aidable to promote equitable program access by preschoolers where sufficient instructional space is not available in the school district. School district SMART School allocations

may be leveraged to improve the availability of instructional space necessary for the preschool program. As of October 2015, the full amount of each school district's SMART School allocation remained available.

Waivers for Special Education Duties – SAANYS Supports amendment of Education Law to authorize a school district, private school or a BOCES to apply for a waiver from requirements imposed in Sections 4402 and 4403, including concomitant regulations. The quality of special education services and programs would be ensured as such waivers must result in the provision of an innovative special education program that is consistent with federal law and enhances student achievement and/or regular education opportunities. This proposal would require parental involvement and could result in meaningful mandate relief for individual school districts and BOCES or for regional consortia of school districts and BOCES.

Closing

The Educational Conference Board has calculated that a state aid increase of \$1.7 billion is necessary to maintain current programs, but current programs will produce current results – results with which the Governor, the legislature, school districts and SAANYS are dissatisfied. The \$991 million school operating aid increase proposed by the Governor compounded by a reduction of approximately \$308 million (for non-Big Five school districts) based on the property tax cap will force many district to reduce services and implement more lay-offs. Increasing school aid by the recommended \$2.2 billion is not extravagant, but would be sufficient to fully spend down the Gap Elimination Adjustment with a meaningful and balanced increase in Foundation Aid, to address a “near zero” (State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli) increase in the property tax cap, and to support smart, strategic initiatives such as the expansion of prekindergarten services and the transformation of Failing Schools into Community Schools. It will be the catalyst and fuel needed to improve students' educational performance and their lives. In fact, the degree to which public education is sufficiently supported affects all New Yorkers.

Underfunding education will not punish teachers and school administrators so much as it will hurt students now, and for years to come. It is clear that New York State has the capacity to improve public school funding, and in so doing, to improve students' educational opportunities, supports and outcomes. We appreciate all that you and your colleagues do for public education, and we count on you to have the will and the tenacity to make it happen.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our observations and recommendations.

ATTACHMENT 1

SECTION 100.19 OF REGULATIONS OF COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION SECTION 100.19 DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL

8) Community school shall mean a school that partners with one or more agencies with an integrated focus on rigorous academics and the fostering of a positive and supportive learning environment, and a range of school-based and school-linked programs and services that lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. **At a minimum, programs must include**, but are not limited, to:

- (i) addressing social service, health **and** mental health needs of students in the school **and** their families in order to help students arrive and remain at school ready to learn;
- (ii) providing access to services in the school community to promote a safe and secure learning environment;
- (iii) encouraging family and community engagement to promote stronger home-school relationships and increase families' investment in the school community;
- (iv) providing access to nutrition services, resources or programs to ensure students have access to healthy food and understand how to make smart food choices;
- (v) providing access to early childhood education to ensure a continuum of learning that helps prepare students for success; **and**
- (vi) offering access to career and technical education as well as workforce development services to students in the school and their families in order to provide meaningful employment skills and opportunities; **and**
- (vii) offering expanded learning opportunities that include afterschool, summer school, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, **and** Math programs (STEAM) **and** mentoring **and** other youth development programs.

Note: Emphasis added through **highlighting**.

ATTACHMENT 2

**FOUR-YEAR OLD CHILDREN SERVED IN
PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS
2014-2015**

LABOR FORCE REGION	Proxy for 4-Year Olds	# Served in Prek Programs	Percent
New York City	81,897	67,565	82.50%
Western New York	12,831	8,575	66.83
Southern Tier	6,506	3,614	55.55
Mohawk Valley	4,717	2,602	55.16
Central New York	6,883	3,742	54.37
Finger Lakes	10,963	5,614	51.21
North Country	4,320	2,066	47.82
Hudson Valley	25,560	9,346	36.56
Capital District	9,249	3,308	35.77
<u>Long Island</u>	<u>28,132</u>	<u>8,546</u>	<u>30.38</u>
STATE TOTAL	191,058	114,978	60.18%

Data Source: New York State Education Department

