



February 1, 2024

**Testimony of Sydney Altfeld, Executive Director, Teach NYS**

**Before the 2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education**

Good afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer, Benedetto and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal and Education Committees – thank you for holding this important hearing, and for spending today listening to the comprehensive needs of both the public and nonpublic school communities.

Nonpublic schools serve approximately 370,000 students across 1,700 schools statewide. Nonpublic schools in New York State employ 70,000 direct jobs, including teachers, administrators, and other staff.

Given recent events and the increased security threats that Jewish and Islamic schools face, it is essential to ensure that staff can focus on delivering a quality education without fear for their safety, that every student can learn in a secure environment, and that our families feel safe sending their children to school each and every day.

After the Hamas attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, we surveyed Jewish schools about their security spending. The average respondent spent \$215,560 annually (\$598 per pupil) on security before October 7<sup>th</sup>, which increased to \$315,943 annually (\$854 per pupil) after the attack. This represents a 47% increase in average security spending. As many of you are aware, interfaith schools across the state have sent letters home to parents requesting additional tuition payments to cover the increased costs of hiring security personnel.

**To address the pressing need for increased security funding, and to ensure that the burden of funding does not disproportionately fall on the shoulders of parents due to their faiths, we ask that you double the Nonpublic School Safety Equipment (NPSE) Grant to \$90 million.** Increasing this grant would allow for schools to get reimbursed to alleviate the rising security costs they have incurred and relieve parents of this antisemitic and Islamophobic tax that they have had to pay.

We must provide a safe learning environment for our students free from fear, while giving them avenues to incorporate mental wellness into their daily curriculum. Studies have shown that integrating art and music into the curriculum has a positive impact on mental health, reducing

anxiety and depression. As the state looks to address mental health issues with various initiatives and programs, the incorporation of art and music into the curriculum aligns with this important focus of promoting mental well-being. Art and music also inspire creativity and improves concentration, social skills, and decision-making abilities. We recognize the transformative impact of hiring qualified art and music teachers and urge you to allocate **\$5 million in funding to the Arts and Music reimbursement program for qualified nonpublic schoolteachers.**

We are encouraged by the popularity and growth of the STEM reimbursement program for nonpublic schools. Because of the program, nonpublic schools have been able to hire and retain quality STEM education teachers who teach our children the skills and means necessary to thrive in our technologically driven society. However, the STEM reimbursement program falls short and is not yet fully funded. **To ensure that the demand for nonpublic school applications for reimbursement is fully funded and that every school can afford a qualified STEM teacher, we ask that you allocate \$100 million to fully fund the STEM reimbursement program.**

I thank you for your time today. Your assistance is crucial in ensuring a secure learning environment and providing quality education for our nonpublic school students.