

New York State
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VIRTUAL LOBBY DAY

March 4, 2014



SCHOOL FUNDING TO SUPPORT NEEDS,
BUILD IDEALS

EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION

ADVOCACY ALERT



March is PTA Advocacy Month

Issues Brief: School Funding to Support Needs, Build Ideals; Issues Brief: Early Childhood Education

Governor Cuomo states that “a strong effective school system is the hallmark of a healthy democracy” and calls for reform. He also calls upon us to work together to build a *New New York*. In order to accomplish either, we must:

- **Level (up) the playing field to ensure equitable access to a sound, basic education based on Regents graduation standards for every child.**
- **Build on a positive, solid base of who we are, our successes and what our schools are doing well.**

Our campaign is two-fold: a letter/postcard writing initiative and a Virtual Lobby Day.

Please, write letters and/or postcards to your representatives in Albany. You can use the attached letter and postcard or create your own using the issue brief/talking points included. Letters should be sent to all those listed on the reverse side, and your local area representatives. Have members sign several copies at your meetings, and send them all in one envelope. The postcard included should be duplicated on postcard sheets available at local office supply stores (remember to put on a stamp). Duplicate a batch and have members sign at your next meeting! Send out letters/postcards more than once. *The more Albany hears from us, the stronger our message becomes.*

Virtual Lobby Day is *Tuesday, March 4th*. On that day we are asking all members to call, email and/or fax their legislators. Tell them you support full funding for public schools and want to see restoration of education support. Contact all legislators listed, as well as your local representatives. *We need thousands of voices to ensure our message is heard.*

Together we can send a powerful message to Albany to:

- **Eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA)**
- **Address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges.**



In addition to contacting your local representatives, please also contact:

Governor Andrew Cuomo

Executive Chamber
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224
518-474-8390
www.governor.ny.gov/contact/GovernorContactForm.php

Senator Dean Skelos

Temporary President and Majority Coalition Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 909
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-3171
skelos@nysenate.gov

Senator Jeffrey A. Klein

Temporary President and Majority Coalition Leader
Legislative Office Building, Room 913
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-3595
jdklein@senate.state.ny.us

Assemblyman Sheldon Silver

Speaker of the House
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-3791
speaker@assembly.state.ny.us

Senator John J. Flanagan

Chair of the Senate Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 805
Albany, NY 12247
518-455-2071
flanagan@nysenate.gov

Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan

Chair of the Assembly Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 836
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-4851
nolanc@assembly.state.ny.us

NYS Assembly website: www.assembly.state.ny.us

NYS Senate website: www.nysenate.gov

Issues Brief: School Funding to Support Needs, Build Ideals

When the New York State legislature responded to the 2007 Court of Appeals demand for reform of public school funding, the tsunami of the Common Core Initiative, state aid and local tax levy caps, and the great recession had not yet hit. In 2009, as the state and national fiscal crisis deepened, that court-ordered four year phase-in of a foundation funding formula was abruptly suspended.

Subsequently, in what was described as an effort to stem the tide of recession pressure, the governor's office introduced the 2010 Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) plan. The GEA not only erased most of the gains of the previous two years, it did so with the same misplaced logic that led to the initial calls for funding reform. The result is that New York State owes school districts \$1.6 billion in GEA restoration and \$5.3 billion in foundation aid initially promised in 2007.

Adding additional stress to local districts, a school district tax levy cap placed limitations on the ability of communities to raise local funds. These actions and broken promises have hit low wealth/high need schools particularly hard, expanding pre existing gaps in funding and student access to learning opportunities that, twenty years ago, led to initial court challenges for the States failure to meet sound basic public education guarantees.

Over the past four years, schools across New York State have eliminated more than 30,000 positions and depleted reserves in an attempt to respond to challenges of the recession and legislatively imposed funding limitations. Adoption of Common Core Learning standards by the NYS Board of Regents in 2010 offered great promise yet has driven many schools close to the fiscal cliff in their efforts to both implement new learning reforms and maintain fiscal solvency. As we prepare for the 2014-15 school year, we offer three priorities:

1. First, do no (additional) harm
2. Acknowledge and respond to the magnitude and cost of education reform efforts
3. Invest in highest priority reform efforts

To these ends, we propose:

1. **A minimum state aid increase of \$1.5 billion.** The Educational Conference Board (ECB) calculates \$1.5 billion as the minimum increase that will be required to avoid additional 2014-15 program and staffing reductions. This sound approach to calculating minimum needs should define the minimum level of additional 2014-15 funding and should be supplemented with additional appropriations to fund any new initiatives.
2. **Reject the Governor's proposal for \$2 billion in tax cuts and property tax freezes.** While reduction of business taxes, increasing estate tax exemptions for millionaires, property tax freezes and circuit breaker proposals may sound enticing, the reality is that they are a wolf in sheep's clothing and will ultimately be paid for on the backs of children's educational opportunities. If New York State truly has a \$2 billion surplus, its first priority should be to honor commitments it has already made to schools beginning with GEA elimination (below).
3. **Elimination of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA).** The State's GEA rationale that the funding necessary to adequately support schools is unaffordable is also unconstitutional and has widened learning and funding gaps among schools. The remaining \$1.6 billion owed by the State as a result of this strategy can and must be eliminated over a period of not more than two years.
4. **Invest in professional development and family engagement.** Invest in strategies proposed by the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Family Engagement Coalition to better prepare educators, parents and communities for successful implementation of Common Core based instruction.
5. **Update the definition of "Sound Basic Education".** Define Sound Basic Education using updated Common Core based expectations, recalculate costs associated with implementing this definition and appropriately fund all aspects of implementation required to meet expectations defined by this definition.
6. **Address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges.** We welcome a number of new initiatives proposed by the Governor but to be considered as realistic, early childhood education and technology investments must be accompanied by realistic current year budget appropriations not come at the expense of current program.

Talking Points: School Funding to Support Needs, Build Ideals

- **Voice the need for a requirement for a minimum state aid increase of \$1.5 billion.** The Educational Conference Board (ECB) calculates \$1.5 billion as the **minimum** increase that will be required to avoid additional 2014-15 program and staffing reductions.
- **Object and reject the Governor's proposal for \$2 billion in tax cuts and property tax freezes.** While reduction of business taxes, increasing estate tax exemptions for millionaires, and property tax sound enticing, the reality is that they will ultimately be paid for on the backs of children's educational opportunities. If New York State truly has a \$2 billion surplus, its first priority should be to **honor commitments it has already made to schools** beginning with GEA elimination (below).
- **Invest in professional development and family engagement.** Invest in **strategies** proposed by the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Family Engagement Coalition to better prepare educators, parents and communities **for successful implementation** of Common Core based instruction.
- **Consider and address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges.** We welcome a number of new initiatives proposed by the Governor but to be considered as realistic, **early childhood education and technology investments must be accompanied by realistic current year budget appropriations** not come at the expense of current program.
- **Eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) and pay foundation aid.** The State's GEA rationale that the funding necessary to adequately support schools is unaffordable is also unconstitutional and **has widened learning and funding gaps among schools**. The remaining \$1.6 billion owed by the State as a result of this strategy can and **must be eliminated over a period of not more than two years**. New York State also owes school districts **\$5.3 billion in foundation aid** initially promised in 2007.

Sound Basic Education needs to be updated using updated Common Core based expectations, recalculate costs associated with implementing this definition and appropriately fund all aspects of implementation required to meet expectations defined by this definition.

Issues Brief: Early Childhood Education

Research consistently points to the value of introducing children to basic reading, vocabulary and math concepts at as early an age as possible. Early mastery of basic concepts in these areas lays the foundational blocks upon which to build each student's educational experience.

New York State presently invests \$385 million per year in half-day prekindergarten programs, provides incentives for school districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs and partially funds such programs through the general school aid formula. At the same time, New York State law makes kindergarten optional, not requiring school attendance until age six. As a result, some schools offer only half-day kindergarten programs or only offer full-day programs to some of their students. Other schools offer no kindergarten program at all.

New York State PTA supports early childhood education efforts, recognizing the value of a sound beginning to each child's education career pointing to research suggesting that every dollar invested in early childhood programs returns as much as seven dollars in later benefits. However, we advise caution with funding early childhood programs without full attention to the cost and coordination required to sustain its benefits.

- Research shows that important gains resulting from prekindergarten programs may be lost if not followed by quality kindergarten, first and second grade programs. Early childhood programs must not be a series of unrelated sequences. Instead they must be systemic and continuous within a P-2 system for maximum learning to occur.
- The Governor proposes funding to support full-day prekindergarten programs for all children. It makes little sense to offer a full-day prekindergarten program to children who may not have access to a full-day kindergarten program. A prerequisite to support of full-day prekindergarten should be a full-day kindergarten option.
- New York State PTA has a long held position to reduce the minimum required school age from six to five years of age. The state should mandate full-day kindergarten programs. Without mandated program continuity from pre-K through second grade, the advantages of a universal full-day prekindergarten program cannot be assured.
- New York must not fund prekindergarten programs at the expense of ongoing K-12 programs. If prekindergarten programs represent significant value to NYS, funding for such programs must coincide with properly funded sound basic education programs at other grade levels.
- Funding for prekindergarten programs must be realistic. While instructional services may be readily affordable, new programs will also generate new building costs and transportation requirements that may be different than for older students. Cost projections vary widely between the governor's office, NYSED, Early Education providers, and NYC's mayor. These widely divergent cost estimates must be reconciled.

If New York State concludes that investing in early childhood programs is a necessary component to providing a world class education to its children and is prepared to address the policy changes and funding needs we have noted, we urge the Legislature to proceed with a plan to provide every NY child access to an adequate, continuous and sustainable early childhood education program through state support and funding.

Talking Points: Early Childhood Education

- **Value the research** that shows that important gains resulting from prekindergarten programs may be lost if not followed by quality kindergarten, first and second grade programs.
- **Order funding** to support full-day kindergarten as well as prekindergarten programs for all children.
- **Implement a reduction of the minimum required school age** and mandate full-day kindergarten programs.
- **Create** funding of prekindergarten programs that is NOT at the expense of ongoing K-12 programs. Funding for such programs must **coincide** with properly funded **sound basic education programs at other grade levels**.
- **Expand** funding for prekindergarten programs that is **realistic**. While instructional services may be readily affordable, new programs will also generate new building costs and transportation requirements that may be different than for older students. Cost projections vary widely between the governor's office, NYSED, Early Education providers and NYC's mayor. These **widely divergent cost estimates must be reconciled**.

If New York State concludes that investing in early childhood programs is a necessary component to providing a world class education to its children and is prepared to address the policy changes and funding needs we have noted, **we urge the Legislature to proceed with a plan to provide every NY child access to an adequate, continuous and sustainable early childhood education program through state support and funding.**

Date: _____

The Honorable _____

Address: _____

Dear _____

As one of more than 300,000 New York State PTA members, I am writing to express my views on the messages contained in the proposed 2014-15 Executive Budget. With education reform and equity receiving unprecedented media, legislative and public attention, Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed a 2014-15 State budget that included a proposed \$807 million (3.8%) increase in State support for pre-K-12 education. The Governor's proposed \$807 million increase breaks down to three key areas (\$603 million increase). For 2014-15, the Governor proposes to freeze foundation aid payment at the 2013-14 level and restore \$323 million of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) "takeaway".

Education is at a critical crossroads. What we do in the year ahead is likely to affect our future over the next generation.

We believe that accountability is a shared responsibility that must begin with a predictable, level playing field and bring State policymakers together with educators, communities and parents in a common effort to chart a successful future for our children. We ask that you consider the following thoughts and responses to the governor's proposal.

School Funding to Support Needs, Build Ideals: Over the past four years, schools across New York State have eliminated more than 30,000 positions and depleted reserves in an attempt to respond to challenges of the recession and legislatively imposed funding limitations. As we prepare for the 2014-15 school year, we offer three priorities: First, do no (additional) harm; Acknowledge and respond to the magnitude and cost of education reform efforts; Invest in highest priority reform efforts.

We support a **minimum state aid increase of \$1.5 billion** that will be required to avoid additional 2014-15 program and staffing reductions. **We object to and reject the Governor's proposal for \$2 billion in tax cuts and property tax freezes.** If New York State truly has a \$2 billion surplus, its first priority should be to **honor commitments it has already made to schools** beginning with GEA elimination **over a period of not more than two years.** Invest in **strategies** proposed by the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Family Engagement Coalition to better prepare educators, parents and communities **for successful implementation** of Common Core based instruction. **Consider and address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges.** We welcome a number of new initiatives proposed by the Governor but to be considered as realistic, **early childhood education and technology investments must be accompanied by realistic current year budget appropriations** not come at the expense of current program.

Early Childhood Education: New York State presently invests \$385 million per year in half-day prekindergarten programs, provides incentives for school districts to offer full-day kindergarten programs and partially funds such programs through the general school aid formula. At the same time, New York State law makes kindergarten optional, not requiring school attendance until age six. As a result, some schools offer only half-day kindergarten programs or only offer full-day programs to some of their students. Other schools offer no kindergarten program at all. New York State PTA supports early childhood education efforts, recognizing the value of a sound beginning to each child's education career pointing to research suggesting that every dollar invested in early childhood programs returns as much as seven dollars in later benefits. However, we advise caution with funding early childhood programs without full attention to the cost and coordination required to sustain its benefits.

Research shows that important gains resulting from prekindergarten programs may be lost if not followed by quality kindergarten, first and second grade programs. We need to value the research and be prepared to fund full-day kindergarten as well as prekindergarten programs for all children. NYS PTA has long-supported a reduction from six to five years for compulsory school age. Additionally, **a mandate for full-day kindergarten** programs needs to be implemented. The funding of prekindergarten programs should not be created at the expense of ongoing K-12 programs. Funding for such programs must be **realistic** and **coincide** with properly funded **sound basic education programs at other grade levels.**

If New York State concludes that investing in early childhood programs is a necessary component to providing a world class education to its children and is prepared to address the policy changes and funding needs we have noted, **we urge the Legislature to proceed with a plan to provide every NY child access to an adequate, continuous and sustainable early childhood education program through state support and funding.**

In the end, if we are to elevate achievement, while protecting the creative and innovative core of our American culture, we must focus on educating the whole child while recognizing that successful education requires a true partnership between schools, families, and primary caregivers. The most significant progress will be possible only when all parties are challenged, engaged, optimistic and guided by the same vision.

Sincerely,

Name (print) _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Dear _____,

Date _____

Over the past four years, schools across New York State have eliminated more than 30,000 positions and depleted reserves in an attempt to respond to challenges of the recession and legislatively imposed funding limitations. As we prepare for the 2014-15 school year, please consider the following:

- **A minimum state aid increase of \$1.5 billion** that will be required to avoid additional 2014-15 program and staffing reductions.
- **Reject the Governor’s proposal for \$2 billion in tax cuts and property tax freezes.** If New York State truly has a \$2 billion surplus, its first priority should be to **honor commitments it has already made to schools** beginning with GEA elimination **over a period of not more than two years.**
- Invest in **strategies** proposed by the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Family Engagement Coalition to better prepare educators, parents and communities **for successful implementation** of Common Core based instruction.
- **Address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges.** We welcome a number of new initiatives proposed by the Governor but to be considered as realistic, **early childhood education and technology investments must be accompanied by realistic current year budget appropriations** not come at the expense of current program.

Name: _____

Address: _____



Signed: _____

Dear _____,

Date _____

I am writing to express concern that important gains resulting from prekindergarten programs may be lost if not followed by quality kindergarten, first and second grade programs.

- We need to value the research and be prepared to fund full-day kindergarten as well as prekindergarten programs for all children.
- **Mandate and implement full-day kindergarten** programs. The funding of prekindergarten programs should not be created at the expense of ongoing K-12 programs.
- Funding for such programs must be **realistic** and **coincide** with properly funded **sound basic education programs at other grade levels.**

If New York State concludes that investing in early childhood programs is a necessary component to providing a world class education to its children and is prepared to address the policy changes and funding needs we have noted, **we urge the Legislature to proceed with a plan to provide every NY child access to an adequate, continuous and sustainable early childhood education program through state support and funding.**

Name: _____

Address: _____



Signed: _____



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