



December 8, 2017

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12244

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The NYS Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA) is honored to represent nearly 300,000 parents, families, educators, and ALL students across New York. It is our mission to make every child's potential a reality and support EVERY child with ONE voice.

We write to you with our budget priorities for the 2018-19 Fiscal Year Budget:

1. Provide a \$2.0 billion increase for state aid for 2018-19 - \$1.5 billion increase for current services and \$500 million dedicated to priorities such as: (1) supporting struggling schools, (2) professional development, (3) increased supports for English language learners, (4) college and career pathway expansion and support, and (5) targeted funds for districts with enrollment growth;
2. Provide investments and support for family engagement programs statewide;
3. Update the Foundation Aid formula to account for poverty, disability, enrollment growth, English language learners, geographic sparsity, and other factors;
4. Make common sense modifications to the tax cap;
5. Continue to make investments in heroin and opioid use prevention and treatment, and expand recovery high school programs statewide;
6. Provide continued support for lead testing in schools and communities; and
7. Prohibit the advertising and marketing of e-cigarettes to youth.

Provide a \$2.0 billion increase for state aid and update Foundation Aid

While we acknowledge the recent fiscal forecast, our students still need adequate support to achieve the high-quality education they deserve in this 21st century economy.

Preserving current services for our students must be a state priority, and according to conservative calculations by the Educational Conference Board (ECB), a \$1.5 billion increase is needed just to keep our schools at the same level of programs and services for students as last year.

Unfortunately, our state is still \$4.2 billion behind in full Foundation Aid implementation. The overwhelming majority of these funds - \$3.03 billion – are due to high-needs school districts and students. A commitment must be made to both update and fully phase in the foundation aid, with a special focus on revisiting formulas for poverty, and other critical factors such as percentage of students with disabilities and English language learners, and geographic sparsity and enrollment growth. ALL students, and especially in our high-needs schools, need adequate support.

Investment in Family Engagement

Family Engagement is a school-family partnership that raises student achievement, improves school and community, and increases public support for our schools. We are especially pleased that the state has invested in the My Brother's Keeper program, and are encouraged that the NYS Education Department has opened a new Office of Family Engagement to support statewide family engagement efforts. Family engagement is also a critical component of the draft NYS Every Student Succeeds Act Plan.

However, this work is just beginning, and we ask for increased support for ALL schools or districts that want to increase their family engagement initiatives. National PTA has also developed National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, and we attached them for your review.

We also look for State Budget support for parent and family organizations that are already uniquely situated to foster meaningful family engagement efforts on a statewide basis.

Common Sense Tax Cap Modifications

We continue to worry about tax cap calculations that are negative or below 2 percent. Therefore, we join our ECB partners in a call to remove the variability of calculations tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and provide schools with an allowable levy growth factor of at least 2 percent each year.

We also continue to fully support legislation passed by both the Senate and Assembly that would exclude local capital expenses for BOCES instructional improvements from the tax cap, and include properties covered by payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOTs) in the formula's tax base growth factor. We ask that you consider signing these common sense corrections to the tax cap as we all work together to support our students.

Heroin and Opioid Use Prevention and Treatment

Heroin and prescription opiates continue to devastate families and communities across New York State. Young people under the age of 25 and their families are particularly impacted.

We are extremely thankful for your support in the past years, as the state's investments in funding and programs have made a difference. We ask that you continue to invest in prevention and treatment initiatives, and we stand ready to do this work together.

Lead in Water

We thank you for your leadership on requiring the testing of drinking water in schools, and we were pleased when legislation was enacted mandating that all public schools test their water by either September 31 or October 31, 2016.

Now that tests have occurred, remediation and continued monitoring is key. We are pleased that this law requires continued monitoring and are hopeful that the next round of first-draw samples due in 2020, or earlier if determined by the Commissioner of Health, are found with significantly less or zero levels of lead.

We are concerned, however, about continued funding for these critical requirements, as building aid often does not cover all necessary costs. We will continue to advocate that districts and community partners work together to ensure our water is safe for our children – both in and out of school.

Prohibit the advertising and marketing of e-cigarettes to youth

We were thrilled when e-cigarettes were banned from school grounds, and then added to the Clean Indoor Air Act. This was one of the key priorities of NYS PTA last session.

We now ask that New York State consider prohibiting the advertising and marketing of e-cigarettes to our children. E-cigarettes are available in more than 7,000 fruit/candy flavors and advertised using cartoons and celebrities appealing to children. Unfortunately, there are no federal restrictions preventing the advertising of e-cigarettes to minors. We hope New York can be a leader on this issue, and continue to protect our children.

NYS PTA stands ready to work collaboratively to support ALL children and families. We are available at any time by contacting our Executive Director, Kyle Belokopitsky, at execdirector@nyspta.org or 518-452-8808 (office) or 518-817-3017 (cell). We look forward to a positive legislative session and budget that infuses necessary support into our schools to allow our children to excel.

Sincerely,



Gracemarie Rozea, President



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