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# More Aid for City Schools, but Less Than Promised

By [JENNIFER MEDINA](#)

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Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#) came into office pledging to solve one of the most vexing issues in Albany — the way the state doled out money to pay for public schools — and to give New York City a greater share of the aid.

Last year, in his first budget, he won a \$1.8 billion increase in education aid statewide and promised to increase annual spending by \$7 billion over the next four years, much of it going to New York City.

But on Tuesday, he stepped back from that promise, saying that difficult economic times made it necessary to scale back the money the state would allocate for public education this year. Under his new proposal, the city would still receive an increase, but it would be \$100 million less than the \$530 million increase it had expected for school operating expenses this year.

The city declined to comment on Tuesday, saying officials were still reviewing the budget. But Geri D. Palast, the executive director of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, which had waged a 13-year legal battle to win more state money for city schools, said the budget would mean fewer teachers, larger classes and less money spent on programs such as extended school days and Saturday school.

“The governor and the Legislature have made a long-term commitment to these kids,” Ms. Palast said on Tuesday. “We have an obligation to get them to fulfill that commitment.”

Ms. Palast said that she was disappointed that the governor had stopped short of last year’s promised increase, and that along with other advocates, she would turn to the Legislature to try to persuade the lawmakers to fulfill the promise.

In his budget proposal on Tuesday, the governor said he would increase basic operating aid for schools statewide — the money used for day-to-day expenses — by about \$1.1 billion. That is short of the \$1.25 billion increase that many had expected. The governor

and his aides also called attention to the fact that the total education budget, \$21 billion, increased by \$1.46 billion over last year's.

“We have protected that priority — that core priority of investing in education,” Mr. Spitzer said. Still, he added that some education spending increases could not be higher “given the economic realities we face.”

He said that all of the promised money would eventually materialize, with some increases pushed back to the next two years.

But this did little to calm teachers' unions and education advocates, who said that city students had waited long enough for adequate funding. “The one shining mark the governor had all last year was how he was able to solve a 13-year lawsuit,” said [Randi Weingarten](#), the president of the [United Federation of Teachers](#), the city's teachers' union. She said education spending should have been immunized against economic hard times.

Richard C. Iannuzzi, the president of New York State United Teachers, another union, was more critical. “The governor started a process based on his commitment to fix this,” he said. “If we blink now, then the critics who say that public education can't work will run rampant.”

Last year, Mr. Spitzer pledged to make school funding more transparent. He said the new way of funding schools would guarantee that more money would be funneled to poor and urban districts, and he criticized the historical political process of distributing the money.

But the way the money is being doled out this year is nearly as complicated as it has ever been. To minimize the reduction in the increases to New York City, Governor Spitzer proposed new streams of money that seemed designed for certain school districts. The move was sure to embolden critics, most notably the Senate majority leader, [Joseph L. Bruno](#), whose Republican majority had fought for more aid for Long Island.

New York City would be particularly hurt by a proposed change in the way the state pays for new school buildings. Under the proposal, the state would delay payment for about 18 months, which city officials said would hamper construction plans.

Ms. Palast and union officials said they were also concerned that the governor's proposal would limit the influence the state had on how local districts use money. Under the governor's education aid package last year, school districts had to outline how they would spend a portion of their new money. New York City, in particular, came under scrutiny over how it allocated about \$258 million. After months of negotiations, the city bowed to the state's demand that it spend more money to reduce class size.