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**Major Education Advocates Criticize Governor Paterson's Proposed School Cuts for Turning Back
the Clock on Educational Equity**

**Governor's Budget would Cut \$6,371 from Average Classroom Statewide, some Schools Face
Proposed Cuts of \$12,000 per Classroom**

Albany—Several major education advocacy groups criticized Governor David Paterson at a press conference at the state Legislative Office Building today for proposing \$836 million in public education cuts for school children across the state. Barely into the second school year of what was to be the historic investment to correct the shortfall in education funding established in the 13 year Campaign for Fiscal Equity litigation, the Governor's proposed cuts represent both record high mid-year school funding cuts and a retrenchment on the State's constitutional commitment on education. An analysis prepared by the Fiscal Policy Institute shows that the average classroom in the state would lose \$6,371 under Governor Paterson's proposed cuts, with some districts losing as much as \$12,000 per classroom. The Big Four cities—Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo and Yonkers--would receive the largest cuts, an average of \$8,922, while the districts with the least poverty would face the smallest cuts, averaging \$5,079 per classroom. School districts are already discussing large-scale layoffs, cutting after school and tutoring programs, ending extra curricular activities, and reducing classroom supplies.

"My son's school prides itself on being a successful haven in the challenging school district of Oceanhill-Brownsville where 86% of the school's students are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. In this school where almost all students meet the state's standards in reading and math --the students are enriched by the emphasis on providing a well-rounded education including courses like photography, dance and ceramics. With Mayor Bloomberg's cuts, the school is considering eliminating after school programs and clubs, textbooks and supplies. The Governor's cuts on top would mean reducing the curriculum down to bare bones and would also jeopardize the school's effort to keep class sizes at 22," said Liza Biscette-James, parent of a child that attends IS 392 in Brooklyn.

"Taking \$5,000 to \$12,000 out of a child's classroom in the middle of the year will be devastating. The Governor could be making a much bigger effort to protect our school children, but instead he is protecting the highest income earners in the state," said Billy Easton, Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education. "Governor Paterson could raise as much as \$5 billion by asking New Yorker's highest income earners to pay a little more in taxes. The Governor's proposal calls on every school child to sacrifice in order to help state government; how about asking the Wall Street bankers who created this fiscal crisis to do their part in order to help protect school children?"

Sophia Jones, a parent from Albany, said, “I want my child to get a first class education and the Albany schools already need improvement. These cuts will hurt my child and every child in Albany because cuts in education mean fewer teachers, less money for textbooks, and less money classroom supplies, cut backs in after school programs. Kids will feel these cuts immediately. I cannot believe that Governor Paterson is prepared to make cuts for our kids, but will not ask the people earning hundreds of thousands, or millions, of dollars a year to pay a little more in taxes.”

“When all three branches of government agreed to resolve the hard fought Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) litigation, the “new” money on the table was to make up for the longstanding underfunding of high needs kids—poor, often minority, English language learners and kids with special needs-- in low performing schools to provide highly qualified teachers, appropriate class sizes, and the instrumentalities of learning. CFE was born as a result of devastating mid-year school cuts in the 1990s. The State’s affirmative constitutional duty to provide a sound basic education for every public school student must not take second place to raising revenues and using available state rainy day funds. Money can be replaced. A year lost in a child’s education cannot,” said Geri D. Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

The analysis shows that the least needy school districts receive the smallest dollar cuts and the Big 4 cities of Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers and Buffalo receive the largest. The cuts per pupil in school districts the State Education Department classifies as *Low Need* average \$231 per pupil while the high need Big 4 cities face cuts of \$372 per pupil. The average cut in the state is \$277 per pupil.

"New York State has consistently led the nation with the worst funding gap between rich and poor schools," said Karen Scharff, Executive Director, Citizen Action of New York. “The Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit resulted in real progress in closing that gap so that every child can have a quality education. For many children in the state these cuts would widen that funding gap--a gap that results in fewer low income children and fewer children of color graduating from high school and going on to college and good jobs. It is simple elementary school math – if we want to close the racial achievement gap, the state needs to ask the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay their fair share. Regardless of school district, every child will see a drop in the quality of education if these cuts are implemented."

“The Governor’s proposed cuts in education funding represent a major retreat from the commitment the state made less than two years ago to fix the historical inequities in state funding formulas that denied a sound education to millions of students in need. He now is dropping that commitment, choosing to balance the budget on the backs of these most vulnerable students at greatest risk of dropping out, including immigrants still learning English. The effect will be devastating.” Jose Davila, Director of State Government Affairs, New York Immigration Coalition

The Governor’s proposed cuts for New York City school children are \$252 per pupil, \$318 per pupil in high need small cities and suburbs, \$334 per pupil in average need districts, and \$335 per pupil in high need rural districts. The education groups are calling on the legislature to reject Governor Paterson’s cuts and to seek a comprehensive solution to the fiscal crisis that involves increasing revenues. “We cannot cut our way out of this fiscal crisis. We need our elected leaders to take a responsible and balanced approach and not balance the budget on the backs of our school children,” said Palast.