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AQE Releases Report *Unequal Opportunity = Unequal Results*

Warns Governor Cuomo that Large Cuts to Education would Increase Inequity

Joined in Reaction by State Legislators, CFE, NYS Assoc. of Small City School Districts, Citizen Action of NY, NYSUT, UFT, Coalition for Educational Justice

Albany—The Alliance for Quality Education issued a report today titled *Unequal Opportunity = Unequal Results*. During his campaign for governor Andrew Cuomo asserted that, “There are two education systems in this state. Not public-private. One for the rich and one for the poor and they are both public systems.” Based on the findings of the report AQE warned that large cuts to education in next week’s Executive Budget would increase educational inequity and would hurt students living in poverty and students of color the most.

Key Findings

- The higher wealth districts (classified as *Low Need Schools*) spend \$1,712 more per pupil than the state’s neediest schools—the *Schools in Need of Improvement* (SINI). This difference amounts to a \$788 million funding gap between these schools.
- Less than 57% of students in *SINI* schools graduate on time, as opposed to more than 92% in *Low Needs* schools. In *SINI* schools 21% of graduates receive an Advanced Regents Diploma, an indication of college readiness, compared with 61% in *Low Need Schools*.
- In *SINI* schools 68% of students live in poverty compared with 6% in *Low Needs Schools*, 69% of students in *SINI* schools are African American and Hispanic compared to 9.73% in *Low Needs* schools.
- According to a new national study by *Education Week*, New York State schools are “a perennial top-ranking state,” ranking 8th out of 50 states in K-12 achievement and 2nd in overall policy and performance.
- Education cuts will have a long range impact on the income of New York’s work force: the income difference between people holding a Bachelors Degree and people holding a High School diploma is \$21,424 a year.

**Complete report with graphs and tables can be found at*

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“The gap in educational opportunity that this report illustrates is dramatic. It is based on many factors, but one of the most important is inequitable school funding, if Governor Cuomo’s budget proposes large education cuts it will disproportionately hurt African American and Hispanic students and the students in poverty of all races,” said **Billy Easton, Executive Director, AQE**. “But it will also undercut high quality schools where over 90% of students graduate on time. Neither of these outcomes will restore confidence in state government or turn around our economy.”

AQE will hold five *College & Careers Not More Cuts Campaign* organizing meetings later tonight in the following cities; Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and New York City with over 500 parents and community members expected to attend. Seventy-five people attended a similar event on Long Island this weekend.

Additional Quotes:

Robert Biggerstaff, Executive Director and General Counsel of the NYS Association of Small City School Districts said, "The principle cause for the student performance gap between wealthy and poor districts and for high property tax rates is the State’s chronic failure to provide enough state aid to districts with high student need and low property wealth. Education funding is not just an education issue, but also a property tax issue and an economic development issue. Cuts to education aid this year will only worsen the already dire situation poor districts are in. Despite the fiscal dilemma the State is in, it needs to find solutions which will not cripple these most vulnerable communities for generations to come."

“While some families are fleeing our city and state because of the high cost of living, others are leaving to find better schools for their children," said **Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal**. "This phenomenon is unacceptable, but it will be increasingly common if we allow education spending to be slashed this year. We need to take measures to fend off regressive school cuts and ensure that New York City receives the education funding it requires. After the landmark Court of Appeals ruling in 2006 that affirmed all New Yorker’s right to a ‘sound basic education,’ we can’t abandon these principles in times of difficulty.”

“In the weeks to come, we hope for a fruitful dialogue with the Governor to ensure that the burden of closing the gap is not falling saliently on the shoulders of indigent communities and communities of color. We have to take special care of our high-needs school districts to ensure that the proposed property-tax relief plan in culmination with a new incentive-based approach is not adversely affecting our young people in high-needs school districts,” said **Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson**.

"The fight for quality public education is one of the most prominent civil rights issues and is even more significant today. Last year, schools across the state lost a combined \$1.4 billion and as a result many are operating without the necessities to support student achievement. As the state legislature works to finalize the budget, it is imperative to ensure that every child receives a quality education from early childhood to on-time graduation," said **Senator Kevin Parker**.

"All students deserve a quality public education," said **NYSUT Executive Vice President Andrew Pallotta**. "Especially during these tough economic times, we must rely on our state leaders to recognize public education not as an expense, but as an investment that will spur the economic resurgence that we so greatly desire for all its citizens."

“The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) legislative settlement signed in 2007 provided a process for adding \$ 7 billion school aid over four years, prioritized for serving the neediest schools and students and targeted for strategic program investment. The law provides a roadmap for addressing this grave opportunity gap suffered by largely poor and minority students. The Governor acknowledged that this legal and moral obligation to provide sufficient resources for a meaningful high school education has not yet been met. The research is clear and the logic is common sense. Any new investment must be consistent with advancing equity because adequate resources are necessary to provide students with the tools, the programs and the teachers necessary to meet higher standards and achieve academically,” said **Geri D. Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.**

“Although I support the concept of using competitive grants to increase academic success in our schools, I believe schools in my district have been shortchanged for some time now, and it has put them at a continuous disadvantage for decades. These competitive grants may be a step in the right direction, but they don’t address the fundamental problem of inequitable funding that has existed for decades in high-needs schools,” said **Assemblymember William Colton.**

“Last year’s education cuts were horrendous and disproportionately affected low-income districts and communities of color like the ones I represent. The schools in these districts are already barely scraping by and will struggle to survive more cuts. We can’t take much more, and our children shouldn’t have to,” said **Assemblymember Francisco Moya.**

“As the Governor proposes his budget recommendations, I urge him to uphold our commitment to provide all students, regardless of background, with a quality education. I believe in cutting wasteful government spending, however, there is no investment more important than the one our state makes through properly funding New York public schools, colleges and universities. Low-income communities and students of color are disproportionately impacted by cutting spending that leads to fewer teachers and less funding for programs including English as a second language and special education,” said **Senator Gustavo Rivera.**

"This report shows the dramatic impact of education funding - New York State cannot afford a budget that leaves children of color across the state without the opportunity to go to college or into a career, and reduces opportunity for those students who currently have good schools. Fair education funding is essential to our children's future and to New York State's economic recovery," said **Karen Scharff, Executive Director, Citizen Action of NY**

"We cannot continue to perpetuate our 2-tiered system in 2011. Free public education is a civil right. Delivery of it should not be based on race, class, or zip code as this new report demonstrates tragically that it still is. It is up to the governor to ensure that even in these terrible budget times that current inequities in schools are not made worse. In fact, he needs to give serious consideration to how to reduce inequities through the budget he is about to propose," said **Carol Boyd, Coalition for Educational Justice Parent Leader.**

"In far too many schools, across New York State, particularly in districts that are highly populated by low income families and communities of color it is acceptable for them to be deprived of the necessary resources to graduate on time and be fully prepared for college and careers. In other communities, that would be unacceptable and certainly not the way we'd extend learning opportunities for children. Why is this?" said **Dr. Pedro Noguera, NYU Professor of Education.**

“The equitable distribution of resources is paramount if our children are to perform on par with their counterparts. Any proposed cuts to the education budget will only continue to further the divide between rich and poor school districts and children will continue to be deprived of realizing their full potential. Therefore, we have got to work towards a solution that does not stymie classroom resources and will not impede the progress made in education thus far,” said **Assemblymember Karim Camara**.

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