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Dear Legislator:

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), the Alliance for Quality Education and Education Voters of New York are writing to express our opposition to the Governor Paterson’s proposed \$1.4 billion school aid cut. The Governor proposes a 7.5% across the board cut to school aid through a “Gap Elimination Adjustment” (GEA), and makes no down payment on the promised phase in of the CFE settlement—stretching out payment to 10 years which will mean an abandonment of the original four-year commitment until 2017-2018. This would mean that a current sixth grader would graduate before the CFE commitment is revisited. Worse still, is the de facto proposed cut to foundation aid, basic classroom operating aid which is distributed based on student and community need. The Division of Budget creates the image of no cuts to foundation aid by applying the GEA across the board; however, since two-thirds of all school aid is foundation, in reality the GEA would dramatically cut foundation aid. Any cut to foundation aid is a reversal of the progress made under CFE and is inherently inequitable.

This proposed budget cut would mean that the neediest schools and students will be forced to bear the brunt of the state’s economic burden. A few examples from around the state show that high and average districts will face dramatic cuts. For instance, in **Albany County** Albany would face cuts of \$11,881 per elementary classroom, Green Island \$24,776, in **Cayuga County** Auburn \$15,574, Cato Meridian \$18,480, in **Erie County** Buffalo \$10,178 Cheektowaga \$13,242, Grand Island \$15,464, Lackawanna \$12,264, , in **Jefferson County** South Jefferson \$17,646, in **Niagara County** Niagara Falls \$11,868, in **New York City** \$10,604, in **Onondaga County** Syracuse \$10,632, Tully \$16,811, in **Oswego County** Central Square \$16,452, in **Otsego County** Edmeston \$11,647, in **St. Lawrence County** Canton \$17,328, Potsdam \$15,702, in **Suffolk County** Brentwood \$11,767, Central Islip \$17,852, in **Westchester County** Mt. Vernon \$14,541, Yonkers \$15,171. By contrast some of the wealthiest districts in the state would only face cuts of \$2,000 to \$4,000 per classroom. There is no way to cut foundation funding without disproportionately hurting the neediest school districts and students. In addition to undermining the quality of education, school aid cuts translate into higher local property taxes.

Foundation aid which prioritizes the state’s neediest districts, schools and students, was designed to address the resource inequities among districts and specific classroom inadequacies both documented in the CFE litigation. In 2007, the Governor and the Legislature committed to adding \$ 7 billion in total

school aid, \$5.5 billion in foundation aid, over four years. The Governor and the Legislature delivered new funding for the first two years, allowing districts to create and expand educational programs, services and positions. This funding was used to begin to bring the neediest districts into compliance with the constitutional requirement of a sound basic education, defined by the New York State Court of Appeals as a “meaningful high school education” and has improved student outcomes across the state.

It is essential that this budget allow the foundation formula to run and treat this needs-based classroom aid the same as other expense based school aids. It is critical that there be no cuts below the 2008-09 foundation aid freeze levels, and that any adjustments needed to update the formula be made. The Governor’s proposed cuts would undermine the progress we have made in achieving the constitutional standard of a sound basic education, and it fails to hold the line, and instead takes money away from the baseline. Cuts will mean laying off teachers and other school personnel, and cut backs and elimination of programs ranging from summer school and after school programs to programs for English Language Learners and improving teacher quality. All of this comes when the New York State Board of Regents are raising graduation standards and the federal government is calling for a race to the top that includes providing more resources for quality teaching and the turnaround of failing schools.

Due to no funding for the CFE phase-in in 2009, school districts were forced to cut programs and eliminate teaching and other positions and were unable to invest in additional improvements our school children need and deserve. As a result, New York’s public school students have made a major contribution to reduce the debt at the cost of their own futures. The cuts proposed by the Governor or any cuts on top of this failure to keep the CFE promise will undermine the recent progress we have seen in districts across the state. By contrast Massachusetts, which leads the nation in student outcomes has proposed no cuts to education in 2010 and Pennsylvania increased school aid in 2009 as part of its commitment to an equitable school funding formula.

Given that the students have given more than their fair share, the Legislature must raise revenues to make up a portion of the deficit. Our organizations have recommended a variety of revenue sources, which are attached to this letter.

In addition, we also seek to protect the integrity of the Contracts for Excellence. In the landmark legislation authorizing the increases in meeting the constitutional requirement, the legislature and the executive agreed there should be explicit conditions for the distribution and use of the Contract dollars. Now more than ever, we need to support the intent of the legislation to provide the accountability mechanisms for ensuring the appropriate use of these strategic increases. There should be no rollback of the Contract for Excellence requirements.

It is imperative that we prioritize our children’s educational success to propel New York’s economic recovery and future revival. It is our responsibility and legal obligation to prepare our schoolchildren for competitive employment in 21st century global economy and to be active participants in the life our global community.

We are counting on you.

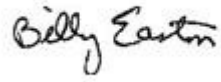
Thank you.



Geri Palast

Executive Director

Campaign for Fiscal Equity

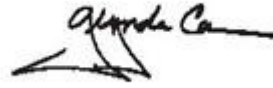


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