



**December 16, 2008**  
**For Immediate Release:**

## **Education Advocates React To Governor's Budget**

### **Educating Our Children –vs- Protecting The Wealthy**

(Albany, NY) The Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), Citizen Action of New York (CANY), the New York Immigration Coalition, New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, Education Voters and Advocates for Children of New York called Governor Paterson's 2009 executive budget proposal unfair and unreasonable. The Governor's budget cuts committed education funding by more than \$2.5 billion. The Governor's budget would deliver \$698 million less in funding next school year than in the current year, but as the Governor's own budget asserts the actual cut in committed school funding that will be used to close the state's deficit is \$2.5 billion. (2009-10 Executive Budget Briefing Book page 50).

The groups are calling for a balanced approach to closing the budget with options that include upwards of \$5 billion in new revenue by increasing taxes on New Yorkers who earn at least \$250,000 annually. The school aid cuts contained in the Governor's proposal undermine the state's constitutional obligation to substantially increase funding in underfunded and high needs school districts as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. The \$2.5 billion proposed reduction in committed funding represents the largest proposed school aid cut in the history of the state.

"The governor has shifted the unbearable burden of closing the budget gap onto the shoulders of school children while sparing the wealthiest New Yorkers. Asking school children to sacrifice \$2.5 billion in school funding to pay for the state's deficit problems while requiring nothing from New York's highest income earners is irresponsible," said, Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education.

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"Governor Paterson's proposed education budget gets a failing grade. By cutting \$2.5 billion from committed funding, and extending the CFE phase-in from four to eight years, he is turning back the clock on the state's legislated obligation to keep the CFE promise. By refusing to propose progressive across the board revenue options, New York's 15 year education budget deficit will now grow to 21 years, and the price will be paid by our neediest students. Simply put, the Governor is using bad arithmetic. The future of our neediest students and their constitutional rights must not be subtracted from our state's budget," said Geri D. Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

A poll released this week by the Working Families Party shows that 75% of New Yorkers oppose cuts to school aid and 75% support income tax hikes on those earning over \$200,000. A second poll released by the Citizens Committee for Children of New York found that 77% of New Yorkers favored income tax hikes on those making over \$250,000 as opposed to the property tax hikes that will result from cuts in state school aid.

"Cuts in school aid will not only harm children, they will also damage our state's fragile economy. Our children's future and our State's economic future both require that we balance the budget by asking the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay their fair share, rather than cutting school aid. After years of under funding and delays, the state finally committed to reducing class size, investing in teacher quality, and expanding reading, math, after school, pre-school and English language learner programs. These budget cuts would undo these advancements and be a huge setback for students," said Karen Scharff, Citizen Action of New York Executive Director.

The Governor's budget proposal contains provisions to preserve the Contract for Excellence, a system of school district accountability enacted in 2007 that is tied to the new funding invested. While there is a slight reduction in the amount that is covered by individual school district Contracts for Excellence, the vast majority of funding that is currently invested in Contract programs will continue to be covered by the Contracts as a result of protections proposed by the Governor.

"Preserving the Contract for Excellence as the Governor has proposed is essential to ensuring that the vast majority funding invested in school reforms the past two years is not wasted," said Easton. "Without legislative changes to protect the Contracts for Excellence, the money invested these past two years in smaller classes and educational reforms would be subject to no accountability."

"The Contract for Excellence, the only accountability tool that ensures that the CFE dollars are invested in the neediest students in strategies that work--teacher quality, smaller classes, English Language Learner programs, middle and high school reform, and full day pre-k--must be protected," said Palast. "Legislative changes similar to those proposed by the Governor are essential to continue the investments from the first two years, and to ensure that any new investments now and in future years are properly allocated. What's more, the Contracts are the only means for tracking the dollars, determining the impact on student achievement, and whether, at the end of the day, every public school child receives their constitutionally protected sound basic education. "

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“Here in Albany we've just begun to move forward with continued advancements in teacher quality initiatives and extended day programs. There are still improvements that need to be made and these cuts will stifle our progress and immediately affect the quality of education our students are receiving. We cannot balance our budget on the backs of our children," said Ivette Alfonso, Capital District AQE board member.

"The law has already spoken when it comes to providing funding for a quality education for our kids. With the unprecedented win of the CFE lawsuit, and the further monetary award that provides New York City school kids with a chance for a quality education, it is perfectly clear that our governor intends to break the law, and rob our kids of their opportunity to get a quality education. The answer is not to rob our kids, but to make the wealthiest NYer's give their fair share to balance the budget," Ocynthia Williams, Parent Leader with the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice.

"The Governor is attempting to balance the budget by over burdening hard working families and cutting school aid and other critical services while not asking New York's highest income earners to pay their fair share. We can and must do better to create a future that prepares our children for success in the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century," said Glynda Carr, Education Voters Executive Director.

“We’re particularly concerned about the most at-risk kids in the system, such as students with disabilities, English language learners, or students in foster care. These are the kids who tend to be hurt first when budgets start contracting,” said Kim Sweet, Executive Director, Advocates for Children of New York.

“These cuts will be devastating for our most at-risk students. Even as immigrant and English-language-learner graduation rates continue to plummet, the Governor chose to slash education funding, making a desperate situation even worse,” said Jose Davila, director of state government affairs with the New York Immigration Coalition.

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The following is an excerpt from the 2009-10 Executive Budget Briefing Book:

*"Overall, the Executive Budget provides \$20.7 billion for School Aid in 2009-10, a decrease of \$698 million or 3.3 percent from 2008-09. Even after this reduction, School Aid will have increased \$6.2 billion or 42 percent compared to 2003-04. **Without these actions, total 2009-10 School Aid funding was projected to total \$23.2 billion, \$2.5 billion higher than the Executive Budget proposal.**"*

Note: Each of the below listed offices can be contacted to speak with a local parent/community member for interviews; Buffalo- 716-855-1522, Rochester-585-288-4693, Syracuse-315-435-2480, Capital District – 518-465-4600ext 108, Long Island-516-541-1006 ext12.