

# KEEP THE PROMISES!

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## **Thousands Rally At City Hall to Protest \$800 Million in Budget Cuts Threatening New York City Public Schools**

Keep the Promises Coalition Urges Elected Officials To Rescind Current Budget Cuts and Restore Promised Funds Cut for Coming School Year

- *Current Cuts Cost Schools After-School Programs, Weekend Classes, English Language Learner Instruction, Tutoring Services, Textbooks and Supplies*
- *Unless Reversed, Next Year's Cuts Will Affect Every Classroom Citywide*

Thousands of concerned parents, educators, students, elected officials and other supporters of public education descended on City Hall today for a spirited rally to protest \$800 million in current and proposed city and state education budget cuts and reductions targeting New York City public schools.

Demonstrators gathered outside City Hall Park on Broadway to listen as members of the broad-based Keep The Promises Coalition warned about the crisis facing city schools if the cuts are allowed to stand. The coalition is a diverse group of parents, educators, education advocacy groups, community organizations, civic groups, clergy, labor unions and elected officials that formed in reaction to the immediate and proposed cuts. The group of more than 70 organizations citywide is focused on three promises made by state and city officials:

- Earlier this month, the city called for an additional 3 percent education budget cut – estimated to be \$215 million – on top of more than \$324 million already proposed for the coming school year, turning an already dire situation into a looming crisis for the city public school system, coalition leaders told the crowd.

A \$180 million midyear cut affecting schools citywide has already results in schools reducing or eliminating after-school programs, weekend classes and tutoring services, textbook orders, instructional supplies, extracurricular activities and other services for children. The cuts have also forced schools to drop or cut back on teacher training and professional development programs meant to help educators hone their classroom skills.

Unless they are reversed, next year's cuts will be six times this magnitude and will affect every student in every classroom.

- Last year, New York State committed to a multi-year \$2.35 billion increase in basic classroom operating aid – also called foundation aid – as part of the settlement of the historic Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit. The increase scheduled for this year was \$528 million, but the proposed Executive Budget falls \$193 million short.
- In 2006, the state committed to significant increases in building aid that would allow full funding of the city's \$13.2 billion school construction plan. The city Department of Education estimates that \$100 million of building aid reductions in the proposed Executive Budget will put at risk \$1.5 billion in bonds for school construction for the coming year.

The coalition is supporting the budget bill passed by the state Assembly last week because it keeps all three promises: It restores nearly \$200 million in foundation aid, fully funds building aid and requires the city to reverse proposed 2009-09 cuts to the city Department of Education. The Assembly finances school aid restorations by adding a one percent tax surcharge on annual incomes over \$1 million.

City Council Member Robert Jackson, chair of the council's Education Committee, said, "Both the Mayor and the former Governor promised us steady and reliable foundation funding to support a 'Contract for Excellence' – and then cut the education budget. We feel betrayed because all of these pledges have been broken. We want a sound, basic education and leadership that will Keep The Promises."

"Our schools are headed for a crisis if proposed state and city budget reductions of nearly \$800 million are not rescinded," said Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers, which represents New York City's 100,000 public school educators. "A cut of that magnitude would reach into every classroom and affect every child with a devastating impact that has not been felt in our schools in decades.

"The Assembly is being very responsible in approving a one percent income tax hike on millionaires to safeguard our schools, and we hope the state Senate will do likewise," she said.

"As school leaders, our primary objective is to educate students, but in difficult times it is also important that we protect and defend our students and schools," said Ernest Logan, president of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators representing city school principals and assistant principals.

"While the city is facing a looming fiscal crisis, it is our job to ensure that all New York City public school students receive the quality education promised by the city and the state," Logan added. "Eight percent in cuts will not only impede the exceptional progress we have made thus far, it will ultimately cheat our children out of the essential resources they desperately need. I believe this rally will show this city and state just how passionate CSA and the Keep The Promises Coalition are about quality education."

"The Department of Education's spending priorities are out of whack," said City Council Member Bill de Blasio, who has introduced a council resolution calling upon the mayor to restore proposed school cuts and immediately reverse the \$180 million in cuts already made. "This is the Department of Education, not Halliburton," he added. "The DOE needs to examine its spending priorities, including the exorbitant costs related to no-bid contracts, overly paid consultants and excessive testing of students."

"After 13 years of litigation, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity established the constitutional right to a sound basic education and the state obligation to ensure adequate resources to make that right real," said CFE executive director Geri D. Palast. "New York State and New York City officials legislated promises to fully fund that right, and they must keep those promises and restore the \$700 million in proposed cuts in classroom aid as well as building aid."

"We teach our children to keep their promises and we expect nothing less from our public officials," Palast continued. "The Assembly has done so and provided necessary revenues. Council members supporting City Council Resolution 1302 have done so and are sending a strong message to the Mayor. In times of economic uncertainty, the investment in the education of children is essential to their economic viability. A generation of school children has already paid with their futures. Our kids can't wait."

"The state Assembly budget is the only plan in Albany that would keep the promises to our school children," said Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education. "It fully funds the foundation aid for classroom best practices and the Assembly finds a way to pay for it through a modest one percent income tax increase on millionaires," he continued. "The Assembly budget also reverses the Mayor's proposed cuts of more than half a million dollars to the DOE's budget."

"Enough is enough," said Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum. "These midyear cuts have a direct impact on art classes, music programming and after-school activities, and these cuts will only get deeper next year. Meanwhile, the DOE spends hundreds of millions of dollars on high-stakes testing, ineffective systems for processing test data, outside

consultants and no-bid contracts. These cuts to school budgets are as unnecessary as they are unjust. We can't allow our students to suffer the consequences."

Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer said, "While we have pockets of excellence in our schools, we still have a long way to go to provide a quality education for our children. Cutting the budget now, particularly for after-school and tutoring programs, teacher training and textbooks just doesn't make any sense. Our children need more resources, not less."

Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion said, "The money that is being cut in education today will cost much more in the future. In order for us to compete in the global economy we must continue to invest in education. For decades our schools have been underfunded. If we do not recognize that educational responsibility is tied to fiscal responsibility then we will fall behind other countries in job creation, economic growth and, most importantly, we will fail a generation of children. We must keep the promises made to our children and do all we can to restore the proposed cuts to education."

"We cannot close the academic achievement gap and keep the American economy competitive when we continue to make budget cuts in education that undermine our children's hopes and futures," said Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, president of the Hispanic Federation, Inc.

"Every dollar cut from the city and state education budgets translates into more kids being left behind," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of The New York Immigration Coalition. She added, "If the Mayor and the new Governor are serious about reversing the dropout crisis facing immigrant students, they will work to restore education aid."

"Parents are outraged about these cuts," said Carol Boyd, head of the Coalition for Education Justice and a mother of students attending a city middle school and a high school. "Our schools, especially our middle schools, are in crisis," she added. "This is not a time to be taking away funds that were promised, that principals are counting on, and most important, that our children desperately need."

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Members of the Keep The Promises Coalition include Campaign for Fiscal Equity; Alliance for Quality Education; Council of School Supervisors and Administrators; United Federation of Teachers; Hispanic Federation of New York State; New York City Central Labor Council; ACORN; Education Voters of New York; New York City Coalition for Education Justice; New York Immigration Coalition; UNITE HERE; SEIU Local 32-BJ, New York Immigration Coalition; NAACP Metropolitan Council; El Centro de la Hospitalidad; Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund; Coalition for Asian American Children; representatives of the Chancellor's Parents Advisory Committee; Advocates for Children; the Center for Arts Education; Coalition for Educational Excellence for English Language Learners; Make the Road by Walking New York; New Settlement Parent Action Committee; Crotona Committee to Stop the Violence; Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition; South Brooklyn Youth Consortium Inc.; Coalition for Asian American Children and Families; Highbridge Community Life Center; National Center for Schools and Communities, Cypress Hills Advocates for Education; Working Families Party; Citizen Action of New York; Coalition for After School Funding; Time Out From Testing; Class Size Matters; Staten Island Federation of Parent Teacher Associations.