

PRESS RELEASE



For Immediate Release:
Thursday, March 4, 2010

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Parents and Educators Reject \$1.4 Billion Education Cut Proposal At 18 Simultaneous Statewide Events

A coalition of education groups has called on the state Legislature to reject proposed cuts to school aid, saying the reduced funding will lead to a reduction in educational quality and massive layoffs.

In 18 simultaneous press conferences across New York State, parents, students, teachers, school board members, superintendents and other officials outlined the devastating effects of Gov. David Paterson's \$1.4 billion cut to education spending. The groups also indentified a number of cost saving measures that state lawmakers in Albany could enact this year to help save districts money.

Across the state, local school communities listed the programs they would have to cut, the schools they would have to close and personnel they would have to lay off. These will be the consequences, they said, of the state's continued failure to fund state foundation aid as prescribed in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement.

The court decision in the CFE case found New York State had chronically underfunded schools. The state promised in 2007 to address the financial discrepancy and made good on that promise for two years. Since then, the state has fallen behind on its commitment to adequately fund schools, thereby threatening to stall progress made in classrooms around the state. The proposed cuts in 2010 school funding would be made on top of a broken promise to phase-in the statewide settlement of CFE over a four-year period; in 2009, the governor and the legislature failed to provide the funding necessary for continued school improvement. To symbolize the broken promise, the groups are breaking pencils at each of the events.

If the governor's cuts were allowed to stand, New York, in essence, would be nearly \$5 billion short of what the CFE decision called for only four years ago.

"Governor Paterson's proposed \$1.4 billion dollar cut in school funding asks the 2.5 million students across the Empire State, particularly the neediest, to sacrifice their education and the economic futures of all New Yorkers," said Geri Palast, Executive Director of Campaign for Fiscal Equity. "The Campaign for Fiscal Equity urges the Governor, Senate and Assembly to renew their commitment to achieving the constitutional promise of a sound basic education and make progress toward achieving full and equitable funding of our schools. Cutting below funding levels from two years ago is a return to the bad old days before CFE. We cannot afford to go back in time. With mounting pressure to increase standards and effectiveness of both students and teachers so that our people, state and nation can compete in the global economy, New York state legislators must boldly reject this proposal and look to alternative measures to raise revenues."

“The proposed budget would cut an average of \$11,677 per classroom for every classroom in the state,” said Billy Easton, Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education. “As a result, students will be in overcrowded classrooms, suffer even more cutbacks in arts, tutoring, after school and other essential educational resources. The proposed \$1.4 billion cut is on top of the fact that the governor and the legislature broke the promise to finally provide the funding necessary for real and urgent school reform.”

"Churches United to Save and Heal (CUSH) is committed to join AQE and others to demand that the Governor and State legislature reject all proposed cuts to education. As a member of the faith community, we are extremely concerned about the education of our children and encourage the Governor, Assembly and Senate to "Keep the Promise"," said Bishop Orlando Findlayter, Chairman, Churches United to Save and Heal a multi-denominational coalition of 140 congregations from Brooklyn.

“Yes, we understand these are tough economic times, but we can’t afford to cut funding for education – what’s at stake, the future of our kids, is simply too important,” said Richard C. Iannuzzi, New York State United Teachers president. “Hope for our future and for our state’s economy to turn around starts in our public schools. And we must do all we can to ensure that the next generation of New Yorkers receives a solid academic foundation.”

“This past year, school district leaders did their best to balance two sets of pressures – to hold down local taxes while using federal stimulus aid to save jobs that provided needed programs and services for students,” said Robert Bradley, Interim Executive Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents. “Despite flat operating aid from the state the budgets they produced last year had the lowest average tax increase in seven years and yet did save thousands of teaching and other school jobs that were critical to student learning.”

Bradley added, “But for the coming year, school leaders are facing more painful choices. They will again try to hold down taxes, but with state aid cuts they are now facing a threat would translate into thousands of jobs being eliminated and programs for students being reduced. We are joining with other organizations to ask state leaders to take actions that would give us the chance to make better choices for the students and taxpayers we serve.”

“The draconian budget cuts proposed by the governor would most certainly result in reductions to school personnel and student services – the cuts will be felt in classrooms around New York State,” said Kevin Casey, executive director of the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). “We strongly believe that maintaining support for education is the smartest investment we can make to assure economic strength and growth for our state and nation.”

“The Governor’s Budget for 2010-11 fills the state deficit with \$1.4 billion from the hole he digs for the state’s 700 public school districts. ‘Solving’ the state’s problem this way merely creates a bigger one for schools and their taxpayers and is neither courageous nor farsighted,” said Robert Biggerstaff, executive director and general counsel of the New York State Association of Small City School Districts.

“It is especially crippling for poorer, highly taxed school districts like the small city districts (57 districts, a quarter of a million students and 1.5 million residents) which already struggle to provide the services their students need to achieve,” Biggerstaff added. “When base education costs are rising each year between 5 to 8 percent, even a freeze in state aid is a body blow for the poorest districts. A \$1.4 billion reduction will make their students the lost generation. We urge the Legislature to reject the governor’s budget and begin fulfilling the promise of the 2007 education reforms.”

“School boards know that they must do their part to contain costs at the local level,” said New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) Executive Director Timothy G. Kremer. “However, school district costs, no matter their size, are paid for by a combination of state tax dollars and local taxes. If the governor’s proposed state aid cut stands, local property taxes will rise.”

Kremer added, “We can’t simply exhaust our reserve funds to cover the governor’s proposed cut, as he suggests. As these costs continue to rise, local districts will be even more dependent on their reserves to offset future budget shortfalls. That is why NYSSBA is urging boards to reach out to their school communities, neighboring school districts and municipalities to find new ways of saving taxpayer money.”

“New York State cannot afford Governor Paterson’s cuts to education. They will further and disproportionately disadvantage our most vulnerable children in our poorest neighborhoods, increase the already growing racial divide in the quality of education for all our children, and tear at the moral fabric of our society. What kind of society forces children to bear the negative consequence of adult actions? What kind of people break promises made to children? The proposed cuts not only hurt our children, they diminish our future as the just society we are called to be. These cuts are just too expensive. Let there be no cuts for our children,” said Bishop Catherine S. Roskam.

“Governor Paterson’s proposed \$1.4 billion dollar cut in school funding would roll back the clock on educational equity and result in the loss of essential educational resources, including teachers, staff, and programs. New York children should not have to choose between an art teacher and an English teacher, or between a guidance counselor to help guide them along the path to college or a supportive and enriching after-school program that keeps them on the path to academic and life success. And yet, these are precisely the choices the governor is asking our children to make. Education Voters urges the Senate and Assembly to protect the state’s investment in public schools and look to enact cost-saving measures and progressive revenue enhancers,” said Glynda C. Carr, Executive Director of Education Voters.

"The education, health and welfare of children are the interests of NYS PTA. We look to a future that will be their responsibility to shape and for which they must be well-prepared. The state’s investment in public education is an investment in the future of this state and our nation," said Susan Lipman, NYS PTA President.

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