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535 Parents & Students from 42 School Districts Converge on Albany to Lobby for All Students

Demand Equity in Distribution of \$805 Million in School Aid the Governor has Committed to Put in His Budget

Support Closing Corporate Loopholes to Provide Additional Classroom Restorations, Pre-Kindergarten, and Affordable Higher Education

(Albany)—More than 535 parents and students from 42 school districts across New York rallied in Albany for quality education and to prepare every student for college and careers. The parents, lobbying on behalf of their children, and students, lobbying on their own behalf, called for the Governor to prioritize equity and educational opportunity in his public schools budget.

"Last year's \$1.3 billion cut was two to three times as large in poor districts as in wealthy districts. As a result already underfunded districts had to choose to make cuts to the quality of the curriculum, cuts in arts, music and sports, cuts in tutoring and in college prep courses or all of the above," said **Zakiyah Ansari, Advocacy Director of the Alliance for Quality Education**. "The Governor has a chance to take a step in the right direction for our schools and children by following the Board of Regents recommendations and directing 95% of his new school aid to high need and average need schools." Ms. Ansari is the mother of eight students who are either enrolled in the New York City public schools or have graduated.

"If the United States is to remain a strong democracy, economically stable and a good global citizen, states must be held to a commitment of providing each child an opportunity to learn. If New York is to be a progressive leader among states, it must fulfill its commitment to equity and opportunity in every classroom. The alternative is both morally indefensible and strategically unwise. It is clear today, the people must push their leaders to this level of systemic accountability," said **Dr. John Jackson, President and CEO of The Schott Foundation for Public Education**. Dr. Jackson, who founded the national Opportunity to Learn Campaign, spoke to parents about the successful reforms of international educational leaders.

"My son has a diagnosis of Down's syndrome; he is in an inclusive general education classroom and receives special education services. Cuts in teachers' aides and speech have directly affected his education. The teachers' aides are in the classrooms to help students like my son. Due to budget cuts class sizes are increasing and the number of adults in the classroom are decreasing. The cuts in aides and therapists have hurt the Syracuse City School District's ability to deliver a good quality inclusive education," said **Talina Jones, mother of second grader in Syracuse**.

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"Last year's budget cut has impacted my school and community very much. I speak for my school that has opened so many doors for me as I am already an entrepreneur artist and fashion designer with my own product. Class sizes have increased to 30 to 35 students in a class. Classrooms are packed; students have to share desks and books with other students. Our Pre-K and Kindergarten programs have been cut to half- day these programs are the foundation years for every student to create a successful path to their future," **said Alexandra Romero a senior at Central Islip High School.** "As a volunteer working as a volunteer with youth I am hoping that the arts, music and sports will not be cut anymore because it will affect the youth of tomorrow. with youth I am hoping that the arts, music and sports will not be cut anymore because it will affect the youth of tomorrow."

"Our Mount Vernon City School District faces many challenges and has many educational needs. In the past two years the loss of state aid resulted in fewer teachers and increased class sizes. Our students are losing out on Art, Music, and Media-Library depending on which schools they attend. Some schools have Music but not Art, some have neither. Our students need textbooks and materials. We have classes where students cannot take textbooks home because there are simply not enough to share," said **Brenda Crump a parent advocate from Mt. Vernon. Ms. Crump and her husband are parents of seven children**

"Last year's \$1.3 billion cut was devastating; my school lost tutoring, arts and our after-school program which was a safe-haven that kept students off the streets, away from drugs, gangs and violence," said **Carlos Ruiz, Parent Association President of the High School for Law in District 3, Manhattan.** "The Governor and the Legislature have the opportunity to make sure that much of these restorations in funding go to schools like mine that are desperately awaiting this money."

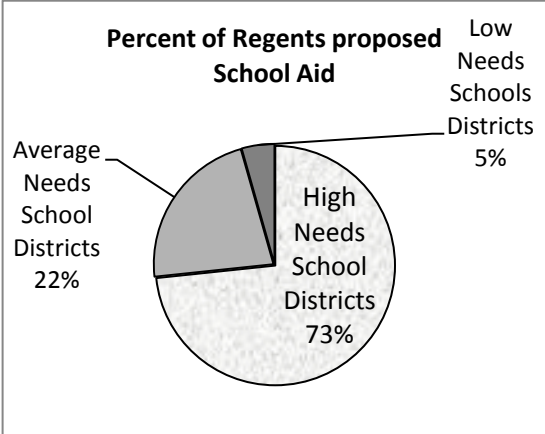
The rally began with all 535 parents and students filling the Million Dollar Staircase in the State Capitol and singing *We are the World* and *This Little Light of Mine* as well as two songs in Spanish part of their appeal to the Governor and the Legislature to prioritize quality education for every student. Then they rallied in the Legislative Office Building where state legislators joined parents, students and other speakers to discuss the damaging impacts of two years of record classroom cuts in schools across the state.

In addition to focusing on successful school reform, the educational impacts of classroom cuts and fair distribution of school funds, the ralliers called for an end to sweetheart tax deals for multinational corporations that are paying lower tax rates than families or small businesses. A proposal released yesterday by the 99% New York Coalition (<http://www.99percentny.org>) would save the state more than \$1 billion by closing corporate loopholes. Some of these funds could be used to restore additional classroom cuts and to fund pre-kindergarten and to make college more affordable for students and their families.

"As the mother of a child who has attended Pre-K, I know exactly how important it is for our kids to have this foundation," said **Ivette Alfonso, President of Citizen Action of New York and a mother.** "The Board of Regents recognizes how important Pre-K is too because they've asked for an additional \$53 million for this critical program. Giving our children every opportunity we can is a smart economic investment, especially during this climate of uncertainty. We're calling on our leaders in state government to stand with the Regents and give our kids the opportunity they need and deserve."

"Cuts to public higher education have devastated the SUNY and CUNY systems and have led to the elimination of 5 academic departments locally at the University at Albany. Simultaneously, students will see their tuition increase by \$1,500 over the next five years, meaning that students are paying more for less. Students and parents should not be asked to subsidize New York's unfairness, we need full and fair funding for our public colleges and universities," said **Jackie Hayes, of New York Students Rising and a graduate student at SUNY Albany.**

Public education in a few neighborhoods in New York City is presently in crisis. Art and music have been disappearing from the classrooms in many schools located in poor or lower class neighborhoods. Due to state and city budget cuts in the last two years the education system is spending less and less on our children. Our children are the men and women of tomorrow, they all deserve to have dreams, they all deserve our support to become the best they could be. Children living around the lower middle class and poor neighborhood are left well behind other children educated in wealthy school districts that received smaller budget cuts. We are seeking an equal education for all children.” **Victoria Ceron, Education committee parent member, Make the Road New York, Brooklyn**



Source of Data: NYSED Board of Regents 2012-13 State Aid Proposal

After enacting \$1.3 billion in classroom cuts last year, Governor Cuomo has committed to restore \$805 million to schools this year. Today's rally supported the New York State Board of Regents in their recent proposal to put 73% of those funds in classrooms in high need schools and 95% in high or average need schools while giving all schools an increase.

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