



For Immediate Release, Wednesday, March 14, 2012

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More Than 1800 Students, Parents and Educators Travel to Albany and Rally to Protest NYS Educational Crisis

Applaud Legislature for Proposing to Take \$200 Million Out of Competitive Grants and Restore to Classrooms, but State Budget Not Enough to Hold Off More Classroom Cuts

(Albany)—More than 1800 students, parents, educators and community members from the entire state of New York traveled to Albany to rally and draw attention to the educational crisis in New York State. The group applauded the Assembly and the Senate for redirecting \$200 million, which was set aside by Governor Cuomo for competitive grants, to classrooms. However, even with these restorations schools still anticipate more cuts to classroom programs. Over the last two years, public schools have lost \$2.7 billion in state funds, with high need districts being the hardest hit. The cuts translated into lost the opportunities to learn with cuts to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, art and music, Advance Placement, college preparatory and career and technical courses, librarians, guidance councilors, foreign languages and after school programs, and class sizes have ballooned. While the \$805 million restoration proposed in this year's budget is a step in the right direction, it still leaves a gaping hole in closing the funding and achievement gap. The implementation of the local tax cap this year will result in further loss of revenues for schools and more classroom cuts.

"We applaud the Assembly and the Senate for saying no to diverting \$200 million out of our classrooms and into competitive grants. This year's budget helps, but an educational crisis is unfolding in New York State, budget cuts have truly hurt our students educational opportunity," **said Billy Easton, Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education.** "The policies promoted in Albany in the past two years have really hurt, how is it possible that in 2012 in New York State school districts are forced to consider cutting kindergarten? How can we be cutting courses students need to graduate high school or get into college?"

"Each year, it's more important for us to express the need for fair funding for all students across the state of New York," said Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan. "Each and every student deserves the opportunity to succeed in school. We need to make sure that they are given the right resources. The Assembly budget proposals over many years work to eliminate the achievement gap that unfairly holds back so many of our neediest students," **said Assembly Education Chair, Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan.**

"We're making real progress working with Governor Cuomo to get an on-time Budget, but there are still a few things we're working to get done," **said Senator Tom Libous, Deputy Majority Leader.** "Upstate schools need their fair share of school aid. The Senate Budget Proposal restores \$200 million toward our Upstate schools, protecting our kids and our property taxpayers."

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“At a time when the states and the federal government are slowly emerging from the worst recession in generations, it is absolutely imperative that policy makers put children and their education at the top of their recovery priority lists. Each child in New York deserves a fair and substantive opportunity to learn—one that assures access to high quality, early childhood education; well prepared, highly qualified teachers; college preparatory curriculum; and equitable resources and policies. Providing this for every child requires adequate funding, the likes of which should not be subject to competitions that lend themselves to a few children winning and a vast majority losing. New York cannot build a strong future by undercutting their children’s educations, particularly children from low income and under resourced areas. The children of New York should not be made to wait for promises. The time for providing their basic human right to a quality education is now!” said **Tina Dove, M.Ed. Director, National Opportunity to Learn Campaign.**

"As the legislature continues to debate the 2013 budget, we have to ensure that the students and young people of New York are made a priority and that their educational needs and rights guide our policy decisions," said **Senator Gustavo Rivera.** "I know that New York State can tackle education reform, while also ensuring that state aid goes to those students and school districts that need it most."

"With the passage of the Assembly's budget resolution, it is my hope that the redirection of the \$200 million in competitive grants will help stem the tide of austerity that has hampered investments in the classroom over the last budget cycles. I look forward to working with AQE in pursuit of reforms that can have real positive impact in our schools. This is just the beginning; the pursuit of the full implementation of CFE and providing critical support and resources to our schools is critical. We must work to see real progress as we move forward in dealing with the issues of reform in our schools and how best to invest in educational opportunity for our children ," said **Assemblywoman Crystal D. Peoples-Stokes.**

“I feel like half day Pre-School and Kindergarten not only affect young children and parents, but the older siblings as well. The early care programs in my district were cut to half day within the past two years. Sometimes my mom doesn’t get home from work until after 5:00 p.m. and my little brother gets out of school at 2:00 p.m. When my mom can’t afford to pay for a babysitter I have to take a day off from school. My mom rarely asks me, but when she does, it’s because she HAS to-she doesn’t have anybody else and it affects me because what can I tell her, no? I want FULL day Pre-K and Kindergarten programs BACK,” said **Darlina Sanchez, Junior in Central Islip H.S.**

My children need to study, graduate high school, go to college and get good jobs! For immigrant families like my family, both children and parents need good quality education, says **Caridad Gutierrez, public school parent and student from Make the Road New York's Adult Literacy program.** Not only is the state cutting money for my children's schools, but they are making it very hard for immigrant parents like me to study English so I can help my children with school. Our children deserve to have a chance at a successful future. How can we help our children reach their goals when less than 4% of adults needing English are able to study in state funded classes? The state must fund adult classes & must make sure that every dollar of the \$805 million in the budget for our children's education goes to the schools that need it the most, schools like my daughter's.”

"In the Southern Tier, we have seen significant reductions in teachers and teachers aides, and increases in classroom sizes in our schools. Last week, one of the area schools announced that they will have to lose 30 teachers in order to meet the needs of the school budget. These state budget cuts are also impacting our after school programs that provide vital services to our youth, especially those that are at-risk. These programs not only provide tutorial assistance but also provide an opportunity for teachers to further instruct students due to the rigorous requirements that they must meet. I work hands on with these students and I understand the challenges that they are facing. Our area is considered high needs and so it is important to our kids’ future that our state leaders provide fair funding to ensure that all of our students have an opportunity to learn," said **Ana Shaello-Johnson, Youth Bureau Director-City of Binghamton**

"The Senate and the Assembly have clearly put children first by redirecting much-needed education funds into classrooms where they belong. While there are still important budget issues to be resolved, the Legislature has put us on the right path," said **NYSUT Executive Vice President Andrew Pallotta**.

"Over my 34 years in the Greenville Central School District I have tried to not only teach students to be the best musicians they can be, but also to be the best people they can be. Creating music together, whether it's in a band, in a chorus, in an orchestra or jazz ensemble, or even if it is general music class, that learning experience can't be replicated. Other curricular areas teach students equally important life skills. Think about what you are taking away when cuts in music programs are made: Music does the following: it reinforces math skills through counting, time signatures, and complex rhythms...in English language arts - verse as poetry, rhyming, patterns, and reading notes on a page. Music teachers around the world know what music does or math and reading scores. However, I am a great believer in art for art's sake. Annette Byrd of GlaxoSmithKline has said, "we need people who think with the creative side of their brains-people who have played in a band, who have painted....it enhances symbiotic thinking capabilities, not always thinking in the same paradigm, learning how to kick-start a new idea, or how to get a job done better." Governor Cuomo, invest in the next generation!" said **Gail Debonis Richmond, Greenville Teacher's Association President**.

"The budget cuts proposed have hurt my school, and will continue to do so in the future years. It makes me really sad to know that my former middle school will be closed next year, and the high school day may be shortened giving students fewer opportunities to take classes. With these cuts, students like me are given fewer opportunities to succeed in school and in life. Why is my education at stake in this budget? " said **Maya Williams, senior at Schenectady High School**.

"We are committed to the city and to those who live here. Caring about the city means caring about the teacher who is laid off as well as the student who no longer receives tutoring, college prep or art classes. When one person suffers, we all suffer together," said **Rev. Frances Wattman Rosenau, Associate Pastor for Westminster Presbyterian Church**

"The Governor's education cuts are a triple threat. They threaten New York's future, by failing to prepare our children for the challenges to come, threaten New York's present by reducing our property values by closing schools, which are the hearts of our communities. And the cuts threaten New York's economy, because businesses won't bring hi-tech jobs to our state if our workers aren't educated to handle them," said **Jim Gordon, a New Paltz resident**.

"With almost \$3 billion in cuts over the past 4 years to our schools, we are now cut to the bone. The once vibrant after-school programs, extra-curricular activities and arts programs no longer exist. We have lost thousands of teachers from our classrooms as well, with class sizes going up each year. Now is the time for recovery. We need to put more money back into our schools and not into experiments where high needs schools have to compete against each other," said **Michelle Chapman, New York Communities for Change parent leader**.

"In the past few years, NYC schools have suffered devastating cuts, which have resulted in the loss of enrichment classes and afterschool programs, 700 school aides, thousands of teaching positions, and forced schools to increase class size, reduce support services, and scale back on books and technology. All of these cuts have disproportionately affected low-income Black and Latino students, and the Governor's budget will shortchange them once more. Our students need every dollar in state aid to go directly to the schools that need it most - not to a contest that will benefit some children at the expense of others. With only 13% of Black and Latino students graduating high school ready for college in New York City, we can't play games with education funding. CEJ advocates for putting the \$250 million in competitive grants back into classrooms to restore the budget cuts," said **Ocynthia Williams, Parent leader, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice**

“My nephew, who has special needs, has been suspended at least three times this year because he is in a class with over 30 students and only one teacher. Because of the budget cuts, schools are under staffed and have teachers that are overworked. There are over 30 students in a class room with no aide. One teacher cannot control a class with over 30 students,” said **Eva Gonzalez, Parent & Teacher Assistant for Buffalo Public Schools (15 years)**

"We are taking the fight to the people who are supposed to represent us. Budget cuts are taking a heavy toll on our education. Less resources means less quality education and less motivation", says **Justin Watson, Junior, Legacy School for Integrated Studies, New York City.**

"One of my biggest concerns is how so many school districts have had to shut the doors of their neighborhood schools which we have seen in Poughkeepsie and are seeing in Arlington and Hyde Park. Putting a 2% cap on increases in taxes, while not helping control the costs of materials and repairs, is a death knoll for public education. I taught in Dutchess County for 24 years in a variety of grade levels. I taught anywhere from twenty to thirty-three children giving me a chance to see how much improvement there was with smaller classes. Poughkeepsie has had to close a school, drop pre-kindergarten, and cut kindergarten to half day. The children who need education the most will be falling further behind because of the loss of learning at a very productive period of their lives. It appears that our government is doing everything it can to destroy public education and prevent those on the lowest economic scale from being able to improve their lot," said **Doris Kelly, former Hyde Park and Poughkeepsie teacher.**

"Years of education budget cuts mean years of opportunity lost for too many New York children," said **Karen Scharff, Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York.** "While the legislature has moved in the right direction for our kids by redirecting \$200 million from the proposed competitive grants into classrooms where it's most needed, there's still far more that must be done if we want our kids to be ready for college and careers. Each year of inadequate school funding puts our children at a disadvantage. It's time for Albany to lead by ensuring that the next generation has the education they need to keep our communities strong."

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