

2014 BUDGET VICTORIES

Building on year after year of inadequate state budgets and protecting vital services, AQE set out to push for a large school aid increase to ensure restorations of important programs. We had several key victories in this effort:

- The enacted budget contained a school aid increase of \$1.12 billion—\$500 million more than was proposed in the Governor’s budget. In an unprecedented move, this increase was larger than the amount proposed in either one-house budget bill.
- The enacted budget also contains \$300 million in state funds for pre-K in New York City and \$40 million for the rest of the state. The pre-K program contains quality requirements regarding: curriculum; learning environment; family engagement; teacher education/ experience; and health and nutrition.

2014 REPORTS RELEASED

AQE released several key reports this year:

- *A Tale of Two States*, done in collaboration with Education Law Center, examines compares fair funding in New Jersey with inequitable funding in New York and the stark disparities in student test scores and graduation rates that result.
- *Fact Finding Tour Report*, done in collaboration with the Education Law Center, documents the resource deficiencies found in schools.
- *Billions Behind: New York State Continues to Violate Students’ Constitutional Rights* uncovers that New York State is not only behind on what it owes to schools—\$5.9 billion in total Foundation Aid and Gap Elimination Adjustment funding—but that it owes 2.3 times more to high-need schools than wealthy schools.
- *The Real Campbell Brown: Right-Wing, Elitist and Wrong about Public Schools* dispels myths about Brown’s organization and exposes the agenda of corporate school reformers that seeks to undermine public schools and attack teachers.

MEDIA ATTENTION

AQE has earned over 500 press hits this year, including coverage in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Syracuse Post Standard*, *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, *New York Daily News*, *Buffalo News* and *Times Union*. AQE leaders were featured guests on *Inside City Hall*, *Capitol Pressroom*, *Tavis Smiley Radio Show* and *Capital Tonight*.



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HIGHLIGHTS

OF AQE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FALL 2013–FALL 2014

Our movement has had some key victories in the past year and though there is still much to do to achieve the equity and excellence New York’s students deserve, important progress has been made.

For instance, the 2013–2014 school year started with the Buffalo District enacting a new Code of Conduct which the Advancement Project described as “one of the most progressive in the country, and serves as a model for the entire nation.” This has already resulted in a 35% reduction in the short-term suspension rates, and a 15% reduction in the long-term suspension rates in Buffalo. The creation and adoption of this new code of conduct was the result of hard work and advocacy by the AQE & Citizen Action of NY Buffalo Education Committee. Thanks to our campaign, a new coalition on restorative justice has formed in the city referred to as Open Buffalo.

Following is a look at some of the other improvements and victories of recent months.

JANUARY

As 2014 began, 83 State Senators and Assembly Members, under the leadership of Assembly Education Committee Chair Catherine Nolan, released a letter calling on Governor Cuomo to increase school aid by \$1.9 billion, matching the demands that AQE released just months before. 1,200 parents, students and community members rallied in Albany to demand “No More Excuses” for educational inequality. NYC Public Advocate Letitia James held a kick-off press conference in Brooklyn as buses headed to the rally in Albany. Together, we called for full funding for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, not tax cuts for corporations and banks.

FEBRUARY

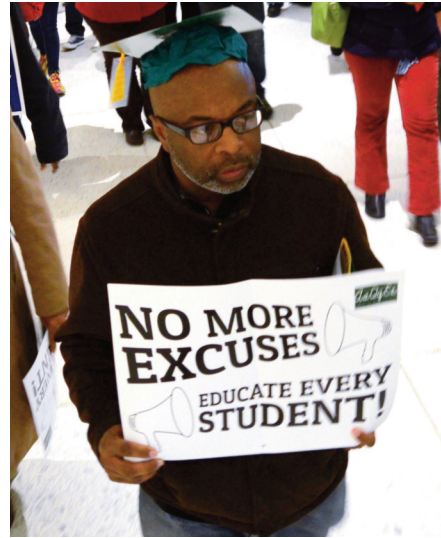
During the week of February 24–28th, AQE and the Education Law Center, visited 14 school districts across New York to document educational resource deficiencies resulting from the state’s failure to meet its obligations under the NY State Constitution. At each location we toured one or more schools in the district and held a press conference at the end of the tour. At a briefing for the NYS Assembly Education Committee, AQE and ELC released the findings of the Equity Tour demonstrating the dramatic educational needs of our districts.

MARCH

Throughout March, AQE organized a series of aggressive actions to demand educational equity as the state budget was being finalized. We held a Parade for Public Education on March 5th with a thousand New Yorkers marching to the Capitol, led by the Cohoes City Schools Marching Band. The rally culminated with the delivery of 14,000-people-strong petitions to Governor Cuomo, calling on him to increase funding for all schools, not just privately-run charter schools.

The day before the NYS legislature voted their one-house budgets in Albany, 43 New York City Council members, led by Chair of the Education Committee Daniel Dromm, released a sign-on letter calling on the legislature to increase public school funding in the budget. The following week, students from the Utica and other upstate school districts went knocking on Governor Cuomo’s door. Following a speak-out in the Capitol Building, students delivered over 10,000 letters to the Governor, detailing the educational opportunities they have lost including damaging cuts to art, music, band, sports, Advanced Placement, and more.

Intending to shift Governor Cuomo’s policy priorities away from the needs of big banks and the wealthy and instead focus on the needs of everyday New Yorkers, more than 400 people protested at the Capitol the next day. Fifty-nine people, including a strong contingent from AQE, were arrested in an act of civil disobedience.



APRIL

Harlem parents protested against Governor Cuomo for forcing public schools into damaging co-locations with privately-run charter schools. Joining AQE to rally to save key services for special needs students at Mickey Mantle School were: State Senator Bill Perkins; Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; NYC Council Chair of the Education Committee Daniel Dromm; NYC Councilmember Antonio Reynoso; President of NAACP NYS Conference Hazel Dukes; Harlem parents of students in the threatened school; NYC Coalition for Educational Justice; New York Communities for Change; and Make the Road New York. As a result, the Mickey Mantle School was saved.

MAY

Marking the 60th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, hundreds of parents, students, teachers, elected officials and education advocates rallied to support NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio’s promise to create 100 community schools by the end of his first term —advocating that the schools must have a high-quality academic curriculum, be in high-need neighborhoods and involve parents, students, communities and other key stakeholders in the planning and implementation processes.

JUNE

AQE and our allies defeated a tax-credit that would have diverted over \$1 billion in state funds from public schools to private schools and privately-run charters schools.

AUGUST

AQE fought back against corporate reformers when former TV personality Campbell Brown launched an attack on teachers and public schools. AQE organized parents to protest her appearance on *The Colbert Report* and got Stephen Colbert to put her on the spot on national TV about revealing her donors. Brown refused. We released a report on Brown and used social media to expose the hypocrisy of corporate reformers attack on public schools.

SEPTEMBER

AQE launched our Champions of Public Schools web page publicizing which state legislators and candidates have committed to fight to fully fund public schools and against policies that favor privately run schools over public schools. We also launched the #WeCantWait social media campaign engaging thousands across New York to share “selfies” online to bring attention to the needs of students and schools and show our legislators in Albany how urgent it is to fund public schools.