

# Alliance for Quality Education's

## Analysis of the 2016-17 Executive Budget Proposal

Governor Cuomo's budget on education is woefully inadequate to ensure every student's constitutional right to "a sound basic education." The New York State Board of Regents called for a \$2.4 billion increase in school aid. **The Alliance for Quality Education called for a \$2.9 billion increase in school aid**, whereas the governor's budget increases school aid by \$961 million. It is now up to the legislature to ensure that there is adequate funding for our students.

### School Aid increase:

The proposed school aid increase for 2016-17 is at \$961 million. This amount includes the increases in the following aids:

- \$266 million in Campaign for Fiscal Equity funding which is basic classroom operating aid, also known as Foundation Aid
- \$189 million in Gap Elimination Adjustment restoration
- \$408 million in expense based and other aids including: building and transportation aid

The \$266 million in Foundation Aid does nothing for schools and students as it is not enough to improve their programming and services. The Foundation Aid formula, which was the result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit and was enacted in 2007, is designed to be funded at least \$1.1 billion to make for chronic underfunding of high need schools. The NYS Board of Regents proposed a \$1.3 billion increase in Foundation Aid.

### Community Schools:

The budget includes \$100 million for turning schools labeled as "struggling" and "persistently struggling schools," schools which the governor calls failing, into community schools. Contrary to previous years, this funding is not distributed through competitive grants. Seventy five (75) of the 100 million is allocated to the 17 school districts that have "struggling" and "persistently struggling schools." The remaining \$25 million is allocated to other high need districts. Some of the allocations are as small as \$17,000, which is not enough to create a community school.

If the state is serious about turning these schools into community schools that have engaging academic program and services to meet students' needs, then the funding needs to be adequate. Last year the governor and the legislature determined that \$75 million was required for 20 schools or \$3.75 per school on average. **Based on that, the state should be providing least \$535 million for 144 schools.**

In addition, the receivership law should be repealed because it interferes with creating community schools. The receivership law has top down approaches that are contrary to community schools as it does not meaningfully engage parents and requires firing 50% of teachers. The governor's budget misses the opportunity to repeal the receivership law.

### Prekindergarten:

The Executive Budget includes \$22 million for pre-K for three year olds, calling it the Empire State Pre-K program. The funding will be available to districts that already have a pre-K program. Districts will have to apply for the competitive grant. If they get it, they will be able to create new half or full day seats for three year-olds.

The Governor's proposal also includes the creation of the Empire State Pre-K board, which replaces the role of the Board of Regents and SED with political appointees by the Governor, Senate, and the Assembly, making such important funding susceptible to political manipulations.

This proposal is significantly smaller than the \$125 million that the Alliance for Quality Education, other early childhood advocates, and the NYS Board of Regents recommended as necessary to move forward on the goal of providing universal pre-K to all three- and four-year-olds in the state. The Governor promised "a blank check" to any district that wanted to expand its

pre-K, but his budgets have not fulfilled that promise. Currently, there are approximately 115,000 four-year-olds waiting for pre-K.

There is also another \$2 million for QUALITYstarsNY, the state's quality rating and improvement system for pre-K and early education programs, bringing the annual funding to \$5 million.

#### **Child Care subsidies:**

The Governor's budget includes only \$10 million for the new federal health and safety regulations and no new funding towards child care subsidies. Early care and learning advocates, including the Ready for Kindergarten, Ready for College campaign and the Alliance for Quality Education, recommended at least \$190 million to meet the federal health and safety regulations and the create new child care subsidy slots for low income families.

#### **Private School Voucher/ Tax Credit:**

Governor Cuomo once again is pushing to establish an Education Tax Credit, also called the Parental Choice in Education Act.

The Executive Budget creates three new tax credit programs totaling \$150 million under a Parental Choice in Education Act. This is nothing more than a give-away to the wealthy.

Corporations and individual taxpayers would receive a tax credit equal to 75 percent of their contributions, up to a \$1 million.

In exchange for this, teachers would receive a reimbursement of up to \$200 for the purchase of classroom supplies. But, if our schools were fully funded teachers wouldn't need to purchase classroom supplies out of pocket.

#### **Charter Schools:**

At a time when public schools are owed nearly \$5 billion, the Governor proposes to increase state aid to privately run charter schools in a number of ways.

- 1) Unfreezing the basic tuition for NYC Charter schools. This would increase the amount of funding NYC must transfer to charter schools for basic tuition by \$12.4 million.
- 2) Increasing charter school supplemental tuition aid by \$150 to \$500 per pupil and is estimated to cost \$63 million in FY 2017
- 3) Adding \$27.4 million for per pupil funding for state aid to charter schools
- 4) NYC facilities aid to charters would be made permanent requiring NYC DOE to pay rent for new or expanding NYC charter schools

Currently, both the SUNY board of trustees and the US DOE, Office of Civil Rights have open investigations on discipline practices involving students with disabilities at Success Network's schools. Until we can determine that students in these schools are receiving equal protection under the law, we are calling for a freeze in any expansion proposals for any charter network with an open investigation. We must ensure that there is public accountability for public dollars being invested in privately run charter schools.

#### **Dream Act:**

The executive budget enacts the Dream Act to allow undocumented immigrants to access state aid for higher education. There will be \$27 million available. This is key to expanding access to higher education opportunities to create pathways out of poverty and into successful futures.

#### **Lift 2% Spending Cap:**

In order to create a budget that really works for all of us and not just the 1% it is time for NYS to end the self-imposed 2% spending cap. With a recurring surplus well into the billions it is time to invest in children and families. Over 50% of children in NY are currently living in poverty. It is imperative that the state increases its investment in education, childcare and other services to protect children and ensure they have access to opportunities to succeed.