

PROGRAMMATIC OVERVIEW

Education

Continuing the Investment in Education

The Governor's 2008-09 budget proposal sustains the strong commitment to educational excellence for the nearly three million school children attending New York's schools and to the four year Educational Investment Plan which increases State aid to schools by over \$7 billion by 2010-11 (Figure 3).

The proposal continues to move toward the full implementation of the Foundation formula which recognizes and reflects the condition of school districts and the students they serve throughout the State. The commitment to address the tenets of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit on a statewide basis is kept, as is the focus on high need school districts.

The Executive budget maintains the Foundation formula which provides vital State support for local districts. In its proposal "Resources + Reform = Results", the Assembly advanced a comprehensive operating formula which would reflect the cost of a successful education and provides State funding for education which is equitable, transparent and will provide clarity. Predictable school aid formulas help school districts plan their budgets while providing stability for local taxpayers. This formula, enacted last year, finally recognizes factors of student enrollment, student need, regional cost, and district wealth.

This year, the Executive budget provides a second year of significant funding with an appropriation of \$14.6 billion in

Foundation Aid in School Year (SY) 2008-09, an increase of \$899 million over SY 2007-08. This school aid proposal is the largest increase ever proposed in an Executive budget.

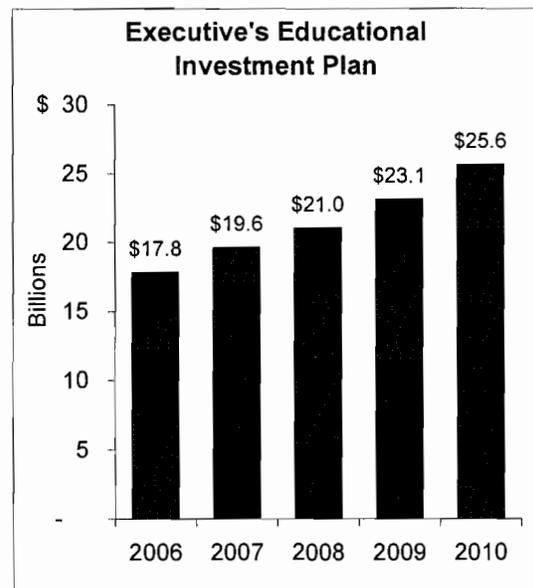


Figure 3

The Governor maintains funding for many computerized aids including Transportation, Instructional Materials, and Private and High Cost Excess Cost aids. However, the Executive budget proposal makes changes to traditional reimbursement aids including BOCES, Building Aid, and funding for preschool special education programs which caps county costs and shifts the evaluation and administration costs to school districts. The proposal also lowers the minimum increase for school districts from 3 percent to 2 percent and the maximum increase from 25 percent to 15 percent.

PreK: The First Steps Toward Excellence

Recognizing that Universal Prekindergarten is a proven strategy for closing the achievement gap and preparing children to succeed in school, the 2008-09 Executive budget provides an increase of \$88.96 million in State resources. Moreover, the budget proposes expanding access by increasing funding by \$290 million over the next three years for a total of \$633 million by School Year 2010-11, when the program would be fully universal.

In SY 2007-08, Universal Prekindergarten spending totaled \$363 million, and served more than 93,500 pupils. The Executive budget for SY 2008-09 spends \$452 million, which would provide access for up to 121,500 4-year olds.

Research has consistently proven that prekindergarten programs have lasting benefits on student achievement, college attendance, and future earnings. The Assembly initiated the promise of a truly universal prekindergarten program a decade ago and has fought to keep that commitment. This proposal is another step in the right direction, by preparing all children to meet higher educational standards and compete in a global economy.

Focus on Quality

The Executive budget proposal also continues the focus on district accountability by linking increased resources to increased student achievement. The Executive budget recommends several changes to Contracts for Excellence, including modifying the

criteria used to identify districts that are required to submit a Contract.

Under the leadership of the Regents, New York State has worked toward the goal of raising the performance of all children in grades K-12. Since 1999, student achievement and graduation rates have been climbing steadily as schools focus more of their resources on meeting the standards. For example, the percentage of students passing elementary and middle level math exams climbed from 65.8 percent in 2006 to 72.7 percent in 2007. Elementary English scores rose from 61.5 percent in 2006 to 63.4 percent in 2007. However, there is still much work to be done (Figure 4).

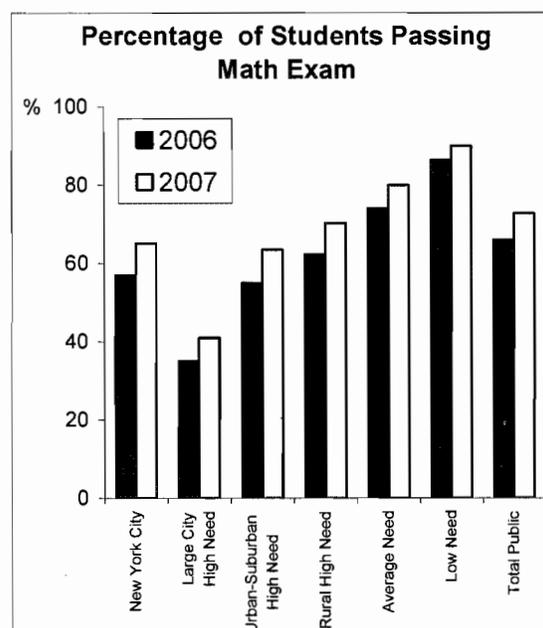


Figure 4

The fact remains that resources are linked to success. Schools in high need areas have fewer computers per pupil, fewer library books and higher teacher turnover rates. Since more than half of all New York State students are educated in these high need districts, it is essential to

provide them with the appropriate resources. The Assembly has consistently worked to increase the resources available to students in all districts across the State and will continue its efforts in the 2008-09 budget process.