



Family of Agencies

Written Testimony Submitted By:  
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At the Joint Hearing of the  
New York State Assembly Committee on Ways & Means  
&  
New York State Senate Committee on Finance  
On the Executive Proposed Education Budget

January 31, 2014

Thank you for giving Hillside Family of Agencies the opportunity to present testimony regarding this year's education budget.

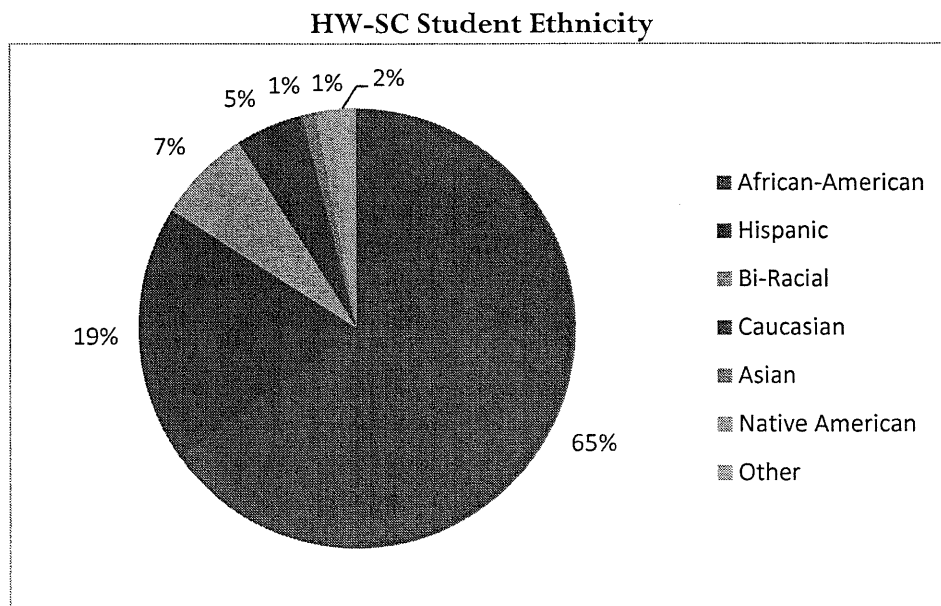
Hillside Family of Agencies is a 177-year-old non-profit agency based in Rochester, New York serving more than 10,000 families each year with over 2,500 New York employees. We have over 120 programs in 45 locations serving 62 counties across New York State. Hillside is a leading provider of an integrated system of care delivering proven and effective services in education, child welfare, mental health, youth development, juvenile justice, adoption and more. At Hillside, we recognize the need to ensure that every donor and taxpayer dollar is invested wisely and has the deepest impact possible. This is why Hillside's strategic intent is to be a leader in translating research into effective practice solutions for children and families.

Would like to draw your attention to the following recommendations regarding the 2014-15 Executive Budget on behalf of Hillside Family of Agencies.

### 1. HILLSIDE WORK-SCHOLARSHIP CONNECTION (HW-SC)

Hillside is very pleased the Governor's budget once again provides direct support for the Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection (HW-SC) in Rochester in the amount of \$490,000. Direct funding for HW-SC is critical to maintaining the program in Rochester and also enables Hillside to utilize the state support to raise private funding as well.

As you probably know, HW-SC is a nationally recognized youth development program. For the past 27 years, HW-SC has been helping at-risk youth living in poverty stay in school, graduate from high school, and continue on to post-secondary education or employment. HW-SC partners currently partners with four public school districts in Rochester, Syracuse, Buffalo and in Prince George's County (Maryland), serving more than 3,400 at-risk students, across 40 different secondary school sites. HW-SC serves a diverse group of students, and students must exhibit two or more risk factors for dropping out of school to be eligible for the HW-SC program.



The HW-SC program includes the following critical components to helping youth succeed:

- Mentoring - HW-SC pairs students with a professional youth advocate through high school graduation and for an additional two years post-high school. School-based advocates work directly with students during and after school, as well with teachers and administrators. Youth advocates monitor and regularly review grades, test scores, attendance and other issues.
- Academic Enhancement Services - Students failing two or more core subjects receive year-round tutoring and supplemental educational services to improve their knowledge, skills and academic performance.
- Social, Life Skill, and Leadership Development - After-school enrichment and skill-building workshops are offered weekly to increase students' academic performance, discourage teen pregnancy and guide students away from negative behaviors.
- Youth Employment and Training Academy (YETA) - YETA provides intensive, hands-on training in key employability and work readiness skills. Training takes place over five consecutive weeks for a total of 25 training hours.
- Job Placement - Students who meet AAA standards (Attendance, Academics, and Attitude) and complete YETA training are eligible for part-time employment. Employment provides an incentive for youth to achieve attendance and academic goals and helps them develop lifelong work skills, attitudes, and habits.
- Post-Secondary Preparation and Support (PSPS) - PSPS provides students with guidance on higher education options and career development. Students participate in workshops and learning opportunities through community partners, college tours, and job shadowing.

Outcomes

HW-SC provides a consistent (year-round, from enrollment to graduation), results-oriented, collaborative approach that works. For 2011-12, the most recent year that outcomes are available, the following outcomes were demonstrated:

	<b>Rochester</b>	<b>Syracuse</b>	<b>Prince George's County, MD</b>	<b>Buffalo</b>
<b>% of HW-SC students who are YETA certified and employed by an employment partner who graduate from high school on time</b>	93%	94%	89%	-
<b>% of HW-SC students promoted to the next grade level for the 2012-13 school year</b>	79%	88%	84%	74%
<b>% of HW-SC seniors who graduated in 2012</b>	85%	93%	94%	-

When the four areas are combined:

- **Ninety-three percent** of HW-SC students graduated from high school on-time, were YETA certified, and employed by an employment partner; and
- **Eighty-three percent** of students retained in the HW-SC graduated on-time.

The Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection is making a huge difference in our communities. HW-SC has been addressing the chronically low graduation rates and job readiness of high school youth. High dropout rates have serious consequences for communities. Under-educated members of society result in an ill-prepared workforce, higher crime rates, decreased tax revenue due to lower earnings and higher welfare costs.

Another testament to our success is the number of private funders that have invested in HW-SC. They help leverage public funding to sustain and increase support for expanding the program. HW-SC has also been successful in generating community supporters for the program in all of our regions. As we continue to grow both in the number of students and school districts served, additional public support is essential to improving the graduation rates in our upstate urban districts that have some of the lowest graduation rates across the state.

Expanding on this success should be a priority for the state. We encourage the Governor and the Legislature to include additional funding so that the HW-SC can be expanded in Syracuse and Buffalo. Hillside would love the opportunity to bring our years of experience, proven outcomes, and demonstrated successes to more students in these cities.

*Hillside requests the Legislature support the maintenance of funding for Rochester. Hillside would like to work the Legislature to fund direct support for services in Syracuse and Buffalo as well. Originally funding for HW-SC was \$1 million but through multiple budget reductions the appropriation was reduced by over 50%.*

## 2. INDEXING FOR 853 SCHOOLS

Hillside Family of Agencies operates an 853 school. Not-for-profit 853 schools provide education and related services to school-age students who for many reasons are unable to be served by either the local public school or BOCES. These schools are specifically designed to meet the intense needs of students placed by the juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, developmental disabilities and special education systems. This continuum provides students with severe behavioral, emotional, educational or physical challenges both day and residential options to meet their individual educational and therapeutic needs.

For 4 years school-aged special education providers were given a 0% growth. Over those 4 years, providers have experienced significant fiscal stress. Last year, with the support of the Legislature, the Division of the Budget approved a 3% growth on only direct care costs. This was a positive first step, but a long term solution to the tuition rate reform is needed. The New York State Education Department with the support and leadership of the Board of Regents have approved a set of administrative and statutory reforms to help reform the tuition rate methodology and resolve the unresponsive, inflexible, unpredictable and inequitable factors inherent in the tuition rate.

The current growth in tuition rates is established administratively and is not based a predetermined index. One of the recommendations from the State Education Department is to create a statutory index for establishing the growth in annual tuition rates which support school age special education schools, such as the 853 schools. A statutory growth index based on an average of state personal income growth would establish predicable and timely tuition increases and allow for improved budget planning. While the proposal would infuse \$20 million into schools, the fiscal impact to the state would not occur until the 2015-16 SFY.

The viability of school age special education schools is critical to ensure that student who otherwise would be educated at a traditional public school district have available to them educational opportunities in a therapeutic setting. Students attending 853 schools are placed by the juvenile justice, child welfare mental health, mental retardation and developmental disabilities and special education systems. Many of our students have emotional and educational challenges, and some have been victims of abuse or neglect. In addition, many of these schools are affiliated with large not-for-profit child caring agencies which are large employers of teachers and child caring professionals. The instability facing these schools due to the tuition rate methodology is placing many of these programs in jeopardy.

*Hillside urges the Legislature to include language in the 2014-15 budget that would establish a statutory index for establishing growth in the annual tuition rates for school age special education schools.*

### **3. NEW FUNDING FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

The Governor has recognized after- school programs as a priority. The budget proposes \$720 million for a five year plan to expand after-school programs statewide beginning with \$160 million in FY 2015-16.

*Hillside supports this proposal but recommends a plan for the new after-school network that ensures community based organizations can serve as lead agencies for programs and that all programs are designed through a strong school-community partnership that effectively leverages the strengths of both the school and community partners.*

On behalf of Hillside Family of Agencies, our over 2,5000 employees and the more than 10,000 families we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify on these important issues. We look forward to working with you and the administration to ensure the welfare of children and families across New York State.