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**Testimony of the  
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**Presented to Assembly Ways and Means**

**And**

**Senate Finance Committees**

**Joint Hearing on the SY 2017-18**

**Executive Budget**

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Good Morning Chairpersons Farrell, Young, Nolan and Marcellino and distinguished member of the Assembly and Senate. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony concerning the education proposals contained in the Executive Budget for fiscal year 2017-18.

My name is Cynthia Gallagher and I serve as the Director of Government Relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). SAANYS is the largest state professional association of school administrators, with membership exceeding 7,000 school leaders. On behalf of principals, assistant principals, supervisors, directors, and many others school level titles, I want to thank you for your continued time, support and advocacy for public education.

Our school leaders are tenacious in their commitment to providing high quality programs and services to meet the needs of students and their communities. School effectiveness and improvement research shows that building level leadership plays a key role in ensuring the vitality and growth of schools. The success of state and federal reform initiatives primarily rests on the shoulders of our school leaders. Their work is complex and nuanced. The role of a school leader is unlike any other in the district. Our school leaders must be responsive to every stakeholder group. Everyday their job requires them to respond to the needs of students, teachers, support staff, parents, community members, superintendents, and board members. Adding to this complexity is the impact of education policy, local and state politics and the economy.

School leaders are asked to assume those responsibilities in highly dynamic and sometimes insufficiently resourced environments. How our schools are judged and rated is based in large

part on how effective our school leaders are on the implementation of policies generated by others, including federal and state policymakers.

This testimony examines the proposed budget through the lens of school leaders. We would like to respond by looking at what is included and maybe more importantly looking beyond the budget to what is still needed.

### **School Aid**

We would like to start with our appreciation regarding the receipt of state aid runs in a timely manner. As school leaders we appreciated that the budget runs were published at the time of the release of the Executive Budget. Having this data in a timely manner improves our communications with the community and is used as a starting point for robust discussions on community and educational priorities. However, we are deeply concerned about a number of issues concerning foundation aid and the generation of foundation aid in subsequent years.

Although we are appreciative of the \$1 billion dollar increase proposed in the Executive budget, we must insist that this level does not approximate an amount that most school finance experts find to be fair and balanced in order to address the current needs of school districts across the state. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Educational Conference Board (ECB) both developed proposals that call for an increase of at least \$2 billion, which of course is short of the full phase-in amount promised in the 2007 Foundation Formula .

The reason that most school finance experts start with that amount is easy –it- includes the programs that are essential for the wide range of student needs in our state. Recently, the Governor took a strong and affirmative stand that New York is committed to being a welcoming and open state. That affirmation starts with a public education that meets the needs of every

student that arrives at our front door. A foundation aid amount that will support those students is our first line of responsibility. We would also prefer to see an amount that is the actual projected budget. Although the Executive Budget purports a \$1 billion increase, in actuality it comes in at \$718 million, when the restricted set asides are extracted. Our school leaders need an operating aid amount that allows them to meet the needs of very diverse populations of students.

Even more concerning to building level school leaders, is the way in which foundation aid is projected to be allocated in subsequent years. The Governor proposes to repeal the Foundation Aid formula and leave schools without any hope for additional aid in years after 2017-18. The Governor's proposal states, "For the two thousand eighteen-two thousand nineteen school year and thereafter districts shall be eligible for foundation aid equal to the amount of foundation aid such district received in the two thousand seventeen –two thousand eighteen school year." Not only does this throw out a stable and researched formula, it concretizes all of the inequities that the foundation formula was designed to address. The proposed budget retains status quo inequities.

Stability for our schools is particularly important. There have been shifting educational priorities at the state level and this year at the federal level as well. At this point in time we do not know what will be included in the required state plan in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We do know that we will have different reporting requirements, strident accountability goals for students with Limited English Language (ELL) and increased pressures to quickly turn around low performing schools or cohorts of students. What we do not know is how to stretch staff even further, because few initiatives come with sufficient funding to hire the additional staff that may be needed.

And we know that stability must be important to the Governor as he created a Stabilization Funding stream –but to us that seems to be a bit of an oxymoron. Respectfully, we would more appreciate a stable foundation formula, than a one off Stabilization Fund, with no clarifying language as to its purpose or parameters.

### **Local Property Tax**

Those of us working at the building level see families in distress every day, every hour. We know the struggles families are having in regard to buying groceries, clothing, gas, and public transportation. Full time employment and annual salaries barely cover family expenses.

As the needs of families increase, so do the needs for support services such as social workers guidance counselors, remedial services after school programs and other school-based assistance. Yet funding for those services diminishes, as the CPI falls. The CPI has been under 2% for the last four years and this year's cap has been set at 1.26%.

We would recommend that a 2% or higher minimum cap be set, should a local property tax be warranted. Establishing a set percentage would add further stability to the formula.

### **English Language Learners**

We appreciated the opportunity to present testimony on “Supporting the Success of English Language Learners (ELL) in December, 2016. At that time you heard two school leaders in the Brentwood and Riverhead school districts. The challenges of ever increasing numbers of students with English as their second language were clear. In New York, on average, our districts have seen an overall increase of 22 percent of ELL students since 2008-09 and other districts have realized much higher percentages. Meeting their needs requires additional staff, academic

interventions, assessment modifications, and support services. While our school leaders are rising to the challenges of providing these academic and support services, external demands for accountability have increased. Learning new communication and literacy skills is difficult and needs additional time - time that our current accountability reporting systems do not recognize. We are recommending the following in order to support our school leaders in their efforts to provide high quality instruction and services to student needing English language learning support:

- ✦ -Restart the Foundation Aid phase –in,
- ✦ Adjust upward the ELL/MLL weighting to accommodate needs going forward, and
- ✦ Short term targeted funding stream in order to account for increased costs that district have been shouldering over the past few years.
- ✦ Support the Board of Regent’s proposals for increased funding for translation of all required assessments in the eight most common home languages of ELL/MLL students. Additionally we would support budgetary requests for test development and resumption of LOTE examinations to be used in the Pathway 4+1 option for LOTE.

### **Career and Technical Education**

New York’s students must have equitable access to career and technical programs in order to graduate and be prepared for college and careers. It has been demonstrated that 93% of students enrolled in school with CTE programming, graduate from high school, as compared to a graduation rate of approximately 80% nationally and 79% in New York State graduation rate. Experts predict that 9.7 million middle level jobs will be created by 2018, which need more than

a high school diploma but, not a 4- year college degree (CTE-TAC). SAANYS joins our ECB colleagues and recommends the following:

- Increased state aid to the recommended \$2 billion level, which will allow schools to more adequately provide career and technical programs.
- Increase the \$3,900 per pupil cap on the special services aid for the Big 5 and other non-component school districts.
- Increase the portion of BOCES salaries that qualify for reimbursement from the 1990 level of \$30,000.

### **Professional Development**

The proposed Executive Budget delineates funding for Teachers of Tomorrow and Teacher Mentor Interns programs, which we are sure to benefit prospective and practicing teachers. While we do not debate the importance of such funding, of equal importance is funding for the professional development of current and prospective school leaders. Extant research highlights the critical role that school leaders play in the effective implementation and subsequent success of reform initiatives. Research by Nettles and Herrington (2007), Fullan (2007), and Bryk et.al (1998) underscore the role of school leaders in school improvement efforts. “Almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a key factor (Sammons, 1999). The role of school leader is dynamic and ever changing. Today’s school administrators must have expertise in instruction and curriculum, assessment, teacher evaluations, community leadership, government relations, special population, facility management and the list goes on and on. As a result, “many scholars and practitioners argue that the job requirements far exceed the reasonable capacities of any one person. The demands of the

job have changed so that traditional methods of preparing administrators are no longer adequate to meet the leadership challenges posed by public schools.” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPoint and Meyerson, 2005)

Additional funding for professional development of practicing school leaders is essential. It is critical to the success of our underperforming schools to have leaders who can effect changes. SAANYS supports the NYSED recommendation for 30 million to be allocated for the professional development and growth of school leaders.

### **Community Schools and Receivership**

A complex web of funding to support low performing schools and districts is emerging into what we hope does not become a fragmented and layered system. Currently, multiple funding streams have been proposed or promised to support struggling schools. The likelihood that this scattered pattern will continue is made even greater should the Foundation Formula be eliminated. As we know the Receivership statute enacted in 2015 required low performing schools to improve under overly restrictive timeframes and onerous penalties. We also know that these schools were historically underfunded and the academic results reflecting this erosion should not be surprising. Although, several funding streams have been included in prior state budgets, the funds have not yet been distributed to persistently low performing schools. SAANYS has consistently cautioned about the unsustainability of fiscally unsupported new programs, in already struggling schools. Research by Hatch (2009) and Harris and Chapman (2004) find that a type of paralysis sets into some low performing schools that are required to take on multiple new mandates. Sanction overload sets in and such schools are unable to absorb constant change. This scenario will only

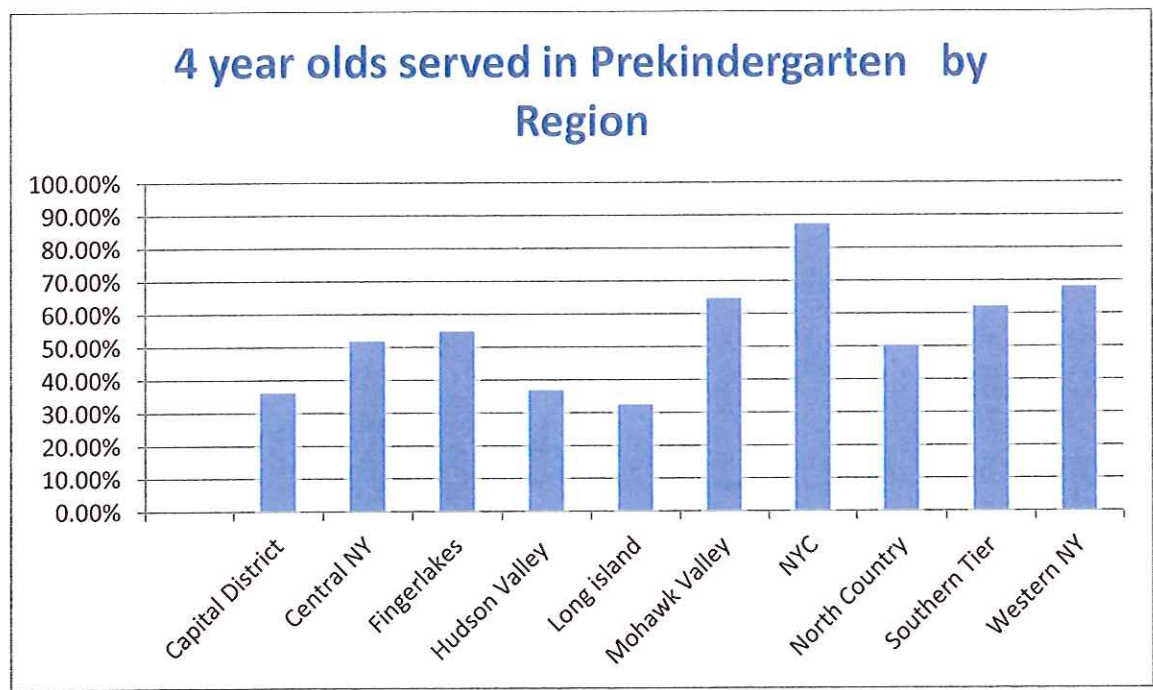


be exacerbated if the foundation aid formula is abandoned. SAANYS therefore recommends that:

- All funds previously earmarked to aid receivership schools be released immediately
- State aid be allocated through a balanced and fair foundation aid formula

### Universal Prekindergarten

SAANYS supports the completion of the roll out of prekindergarten programs to all districts, so that all four year olds have access to full - day prekindergarten. The prekindergarten program started in New York in 1967. It is time to have this highly effective, research - based program, solidly implemented across the state. Currently, NYC leads the state by providing prekindergarten to approximately 87% of four year olds in the city. However, the percentages of 4 year olds enrolled in prekindergarten across the state vary widely, as is demonstrated in the chart below:



SAANYS recommends that:

- ✦ The time frame for collapsing the seven differing prekindergarten funding streams be decreased, especially in districts identified as low performing. Although the process and concept of collapsing funding streams is commendable, at the current rate this process would not be completed until 2021. Our NYS prekindergarten program will then be over 50 years old at that point.
- ✦ -Funding on 4 year old students be the highest priority and move funding to three year olds only after all 4 year olds have access to prekindergarten programs.
- ✦ As funding streams are collapsed, that the per pupil allocation for full day prekindergarten remain \$10,000, or twice the half day program allocation.
- ✦ The Executive Budget to increase funding to prekindergarten programs by \$100 million.
- ✦ Article VII so as to ensure that districts who decide to operate half day programs, instead of full day, are not penalized. As currently worded, such districts would not receive funding if they converted full day classes to half day classes.
- ✦ The NYSED request is supported for the creation of three prekindergarten technical assistance centers. As the rollout of new K-2 and other content standards emerge, it is critical that school leaders understand how to ensure that programs are age and content appropriate and how to evaluate early childhood teachers.

Additionally, SAANYS advocates that kindergarten become a required component of our Prek-12 system. As we realize a universal prekindergarten program, it is critical that the provision of Kindergarten be ensured. At the present time, it is possible for districts to provide prekindergarten, yet not a kindergarten program. It is time to ensure that all districts must provide kindergarten as part of public education.

## **Summary**

The centrality of education to the well-being of our state and nation is critical. Educators across the state need a firm and stable foundation on which to make improvements and anticipate student needs. When we undermine the fiscal foundation, educators have fewer and weaker tools on which to build a solid structure. Our school leaders need to rely on the state policymakers to provide them with the fiscal resources to implement programs that we have made priorities. School leaders are not able to do that with unpredictable funding formulas that translate into unreliable supports. On behalf of school leaders across the state we therefore request your support of a state education budget that provides stability, sustainability and support. Thank you.