



## Joint Legislative Hearing on the Executive Proposal 2018-19 Testimony by the Alliance for Quality Education.

January 30, 2018

Dear Members of the Assembly Ways and Means and Education Committees and the Senate Finance and Education Committees:

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to testify before you on the budget that Governor Cuomo has proposed.

Governor Cuomo vowed to bring equity in education. He said:

**“We must address education funding inequities and dedicate more of our state school aid to poorer districts.”** State of the State, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018.

But actions speak louder than words. Over the last seven years, Governor Cuomo has not backed his words with action. Consistently and systematically, he has proposed budgets with inadequate amounts of funding for Foundation Aid or proposed eliminating Foundation Aid altogether in attempt to erase the commitment the state made to schoolchildren in 2007. The 2007 commitment was a promise by the state to infuse equitable funding to enable educational opportunity for underserved students, particularly Black, Brown and low income students. This year continues on the trend of inadequate school aid increases with only \$769 million proposed. The Foundation Aid increase included in the executive budget can only be described as pitiful, at \$338 million.

As Assembly member Phil Ramos said last week addressing hundreds of parents, students, and teachers "What we're fighting for is much more than just your education and for you to have an opportunity...You are at the forefront of the modern-day civil rights struggle. **[R]acism has gone underground and modern-day cross burning is done with a calculator, it's done with a formula.**"

The governor made a big deal in his delivery of the budget about equity. Yet, his budget includes none or only a fraction of what is necessary to have equity. An equitable budget proposal must include adequate funding equitably distributed; anything less would mean denying opportunity and justice equitably. Black, Brown and low income students have been denied opportunity for long enough. The budget does not fund schools adequately to enable them to:

- provide culturally responsive education where students' diversity of history, culture and race is reflected in their education;

- foster a safe and supportive school climate free from harassment, bullying and discrimination;
- recruit and retain teachers from diverse backgrounds;
- provide engaging and challenging curricula, programming and services through sustainable community schools;
- provide a strong foundation for our youngest learners through high quality child care and full-day pre-K programs.

This budget proposal is not based on equity because it does not ensure that Black, Brown and low income students have the resources they have been denied that would close the opportunity gap. New York State owes schools across the state \$4.2 billion. **Seventy four percent (74%) of the Foundation Aid owed is due to school districts with 40% or more Black and Brown students.**

Currently, there is a \$7,229 gap between the districts that have 40% or more Black and Brown students and the 100 wealthiest school districts. This gap would be reduced by \$2,067 if the all the Foundation Aid owed to these students was provided. This is the kind of funding that allows schools to hire and train teachers, social workers, school counselors, and psychologists; implement community schools; expand pre-K; and, implement reforms for a more positive school climate.

Instead, the executive proposal is silent on a phase-in timeline for the Foundation Aid due to schoolchildren since 2007. This is in stark opposition to the proposal of the New York State Board of Regents which includes \$1.2 billion in Foundation Aid increase with a three year phase-in. In a continuing strategy of distraction, the governor proposes a few absurd policy changes under the auspices of ensuring that state money is spent well and reaching the poorest schools first. The first of these proposals couples state aid increases for the Big Five and districts that have more than nine schools with the creation of spending plan showing the level of funding that each school gets and its approval not only by the State Education Department but also the Division of Budget. We think that is an executive overreach that goes contrary to the principle of local control and the autonomy that school districts have. We urge you to reject it. The second of these policies is capping reimbursable aids at two percent. We urge you to reject this proposal as well as all of these aids, transportation, building, and BOCES aids, are integral to the operation of the schools.

There are a few positive steps in the right direction in the executive proposal. We agree with the \$50 million increase of Community Schools funding, but we would urge you to take that out of Foundation Aid to ensure that funding is used for implementation of full community schools instead of only implementing some aspects of the model. We also agree with the \$15 million increase in pre-K funding and urge you to increase it further as the state currently only covers 21% of the four-year-olds outside of New York City. While the governor promised back in 2013 that he will fund any district that is ready to implement full-day pre-K, he has certainly and unsurprisingly not supported his words with actions. At the rate he has increased pre-K funding, it will take 163 years to fully serve all the children in the state (57 years if we go off the \$15 million proposal he has). We urge you to increase funding to \$150 million to expand quality full day pre-K outside of New York City. Community Schools and Pre-K are evidence-based

strategies, with hundreds of research studies illustrating the positive results full implementation provides.

Contrary to pre-K and community schools, expansion of charters and increase of funding for charter schools is not evidence-based. Research shows that charter schools, not only do not send more students to college, but rather they increase segregation and enhance the school-to-prison pipeline. The executive budget includes \$22.6 million for New York City charter schools, in addition to the statutory increase they are going to receive, as well an unfair penalization of New York City public schools by capping the reimbursement that city schools receive to alleviate the fiscal impact. We urge you to reject these proposals and to decouple charter school tuition payment increase from the school aid increase that public schools were receiving.

Our state has always prided itself of striving to meet the needs of our special education students. This executive budget proposes changes to the formula used to make payments to summer special education programs for school-age children. These changes will result in cut of \$34 million dollars to the vast majority of school districts and it will result in students with disabilities not receiving the programming and services they need. We urge you to reject this change.

And, lastly, on revenues, we are heartened to see the governor propose some revenue raising actions, though we believe that his budget does not go far enough to capture the windfall that big corporations and high income earners are getting from the federal government. We, along with other groups, are putting forward a package of revenue raising actions that will enable our state to protect the most vulnerable and fund the services and programming necessary.

The time is now for you to take on Governor Cuomo's failure to put his words into actions and address the systemic racism and economic inequality in education in order to move our state forward on the path to equity. As Martin Luther King Jr. said: ***"Justice too long delayed is justice denied."*** **New York's students have been waiting over a decade for education justice.** A generation of students have already lost out on the unfilled promise of education justice and equity. In 2007, as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, the State committed to provide \$5.5 billion in Foundation Aid increases over four years. The State provided only two years of the commitment before Governors Paterson and Cuomo cut \$2.7 billion in 2010 and 2011. Governor Cuomo likes to say that he has increased education funding, but the numbers tell a different story. Year after year he has only kept up with inflation without providing for the improvements need for equity. The state's final budget must fully fund equity in 2018 by committing to the full Foundation Aid phase-in and must protect our state's students.