



Written Testimony of Nika Milbrun, Legislative Director, Teach NYS

**Before the 2019 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education
February 6, 2019**

Good Morning Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer, Benedetto and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal and Education Committees. Thank you for holding this important hearing, and for spending today listening to the diverse views in particular from both the public and nonpublic school communities.

Let me first state that we all appreciate the importance of good public schools. We know and appreciate the hardships faced by teachers and faculty and how hard parents in all schools work to make sure their kids get the best shot in life. It is a supreme duty incumbent on all of us, and we applaud all teachers and principals across our great state.

Today, we are here to address a specific funding issue for nonpublic schools and the nonpublic school community.

Firstly, we appreciate the Governor's Executive Budget which includes funding for programs that serve as critical sources of aid for nonpublic schools across our state. Specifically, we are grateful that the budget includes increased funding totaling \$193 million for important programs like Mandated Service Reimbursement (MSR) and the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP). Moreover, the Governor's allocation of \$25 million for security for vulnerable institutions is a recognition that all school children deserve to be safe in school, no matter who they are, where they are from or what kind of family they come from.

Secondly, we are encouraged by the Governor's inclusion of the recently created STEM reimbursement program and for the continuation of this program from past years. We believe this program holds the single greatest potential for ensuring that students continue to receive the best possible education. There is a clear link between a solid foundation in science and math instruction, which this program will help provide, and better paying jobs.

However, more needs to be done. Let me explain why.

The nonpublic school community is 1,600 schools strong, educating approximately 400,000 children in New York State.

That's 14.3% of all students in NYS being educated in non-public schools.

Yet, our state spends \$24.8 Billion annually in total education funding. Even with the increases in services noted above, the nonpublic school funding amounts to less than 1% of our state's total education funding. That's an indirect benefit to the state of close to \$11 billion in education funding to the state's taxpayers being borne by nonpublic schools.

To put it bluntly, the nonpublic school community – schools, parents, donors, and community institutions, continues to sustain a backbreaking educational and financial burden.



So, while the Governor's inclusion of the "STEM Reimbursement" program is encouraging, the current level of funding isn't enough. By August 1, 2018, the program had received 1,800 applications totaling \$91 million for FY 2018 alone. That's what nonpublic schools are spending on STEM education today. A whopping \$91 million. The current allocation is only \$20 million.

Consequently, we need to take bold action in this budget. We need to bring the funding for the stem reimbursement program in line with the \$91 million in demand and applications. We need tangible increase in the assembly/senate budget proposals.

Nonpublic schools account for more than 70,000 direct jobs, including teachers, administrators and other staff. Additionally, over 15,000 people in New York have jobs that depend on providing private schools or their employees with suppliers or services. Our schools generate \$537 million in state and local revenues through such sources as employment taxes, social security taxes, excise taxes, and sales taxes.

Investing in nonpublic schools bring significant return on investment across the state. The multiplier effect will translate into a greater tax base and increasing revenues for our public school system as well. An investment in nonpublic school students today, will yield a big dividend for all of us, even the public school community.

We believe that we can find a balance - which allows for continued investment in the public schools and allows for relief to nonpublic school parents and schools. The key to this balance is investing in the STEM reimbursement program. It's time to bring the program in line with the \$91 million in demands for reimbursement. Nonpublic schools and students depend on it. They already bear a tremendous burden to the collective benefit of everyone in in the state.

Our state has made great strides in educational equity over the past decade. Let's not leave the nonpublic school community behind.