



January 28, 2021

**Written Testimony of Maury Litwack, Executive Director, Teach NYS  
Before the 2021 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary Education**

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.

We know and appreciate the hardships faced by teachers, staff and parents in all schools, especially this past year. During these unprecedented times both the public and nonpublic school communities have been working diligently to keep our children and teachers safe, while at the same time fulfilling our incumbent duty to provide our children with a quality and comprehensive education.

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

Nonpublic schools have spent millions of dollars complying with state-imposed health protocols to maintain teaching and learning whether remote or in-person. Costs, so far, have ranged between tens of thousands of dollars to upwards of millions of dollars (depending on school size) for expenses included but not limited to the hiring of additional COVID-related staff; necessary technology upgrades; on-going school sanitizing; physical protective barriers and signage; personal protective equipment; air filtration system upgrades and, of course, the on-going testing of students and faculty for COVID infections as well as data collection and reporting. It is critical that nonpublic schools be reimbursed for these expenses and provided additional current-year funding to cover on-going COVID-related costs. NYS continues to make great strides in containing the spread of COVID-19. In doing so, let's ensure that the health and safety of the nonpublic school community is not left behind and guarantee all schools are reimbursed for the cost of COVID-related expenses.

Although schools were forced to shift their focus to responding to the COVID pandemic, every-day instructional programs continued. We thank the Governor for including funding for programs that serve as critical sources of aid for nonpublic schools across our state in his Executive Budget. Specifically, we are grateful that \$193 million will remain available for 2020-21 aid for Mandated Service Reimbursement (MSR) and the Comprehensive Attendance Policy

(CAP). We were also encouraged to see that MSR and CAP were included for the 2021-2022 year, however, we are concerned that the program was reduced to \$189 million. This program is vital for nonpublic schools across the state, and as these schools face unprecedented challenges and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, reductions in crucial state funding places extreme hardships on an already fragile nonpublic school system. We request for increased funding for the MSR and CAP programs so that nonpublic schools are equipped to meet the financial challenges due to the pandemic.

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the mid-March shutdown of ALL schools in the state, it became clear that school districts would not be able to fulfill their required 180 days of instruction and that, as a result, their state aid would be automatically reduced. The Governor and lawmakers, appropriately, moved quickly to ensure that aid to public schools would be “held harmless” so as not to penalize districts financially for circumstances beyond their control. A comparable situation exists for most nonpublic schools wherein their 2019-20 school year aid due in early 2021 and their 2020-21 school year aid due in early 2022, will be automatically reduced because the State has been forced to cancel the administration of state exams. Consistent with how the automatic cut to public school aid was averted (as if districts were in session for 180 days), we ask that you ensure the automatic cuts to Mandated Services Aid be averted by allowing PAR and CAP to be claimed as if nonpublic schools were in session for a full year. Additionally, we ask that you ensure the automatic cuts to Mandated Services Aid be averted by allowing MSA to be claimed as if the state tests were administered.

We are also encouraged by the Governor’s inclusion of the STEM reimbursement program in his proposed budget so that this crucial funding source continues from past years. Continuing to fund this program is recognition by the state of the growing need for qualified STEM education teachers in nonpublic schools by providing grants to reimburse schools for costs of STEM education teacher’s salaries. The program continues to ensure that our students are prepared for the future. However, like proposed cuts to MSR and CAP, we are concerned that this program is reduced to \$29.4 million this year. The STEM reimbursement program is another tentpole funding source for nonpublic schools. Cutting funding in this moment of financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic creates a devastating burden on nonpublic schools. We ask that funding for the STEM reimbursement program increase this year.

The importance of the STEM reimbursement program is evidenced by how many nonpublic schools have applied. By August 1, 2018, the state had received 1,800 applications totaling \$81 million. Although we recognize that the state cannot fulfill the \$81 million demand in applications this year, it is vital that we continue the STEM reimbursement program commitment especially during a time when our nonpublic school teachers have faced unprecedented demands.

Moreover, the Governor’s continued allocation of \$15 million for the Nonpublic School Safety Equipment (NPSE) Grant is encouraging, however, we would also like to see continued funding allocated for security to our vulnerable institutions. We take no pleasure in requesting continued and increased funding for safety and security, however, with the tragic stream of recent antisemitic events, we must protect our children. This is the stark reality we face during these frightening times and we ask that you recognize that all school children deserve to be safe in school, no matter who

they are, where they are from or what practices and beliefs they have. We remain grateful for these programs and in light of the recent antisemitic cyberattacks, we are seeking an increase in funding and adding cyber security measures as allowable expenses in these programs to combat this new threat.

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 the state.

During these difficult times, it is critical that we provide our public and nonpublic school children with quality education while making their health and safety a priority. Our state has made great strides in educational equity over the past decade. Let's not leave the nonpublic school community behind.