



# THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Testimony Presented to  
Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature  
Hearing on the FY 2025-2026 Executive Budget  
Elementary & Secondary Education

January 29, 2025

Albany, New York

---

Cleary School for the Deaf (Nesconset)  
Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)  
New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)  
New York School for the Deaf (White Plains)  
St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf  
(Brooklyn)  
St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Buffalo)

Henry Viscardi School (Albertson)  
Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)  
Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf (Mill Neck)  
Rochester School for the Deaf (Rochester)  
St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)

Good afternoon, Assemblymember Pretlow, Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Benedetto, Senator Mayer, Senator Liu and your honorable colleagues.

I am Dr. Bernadette Kappen, Superintendent of the New York Institute for Special Education in the Bronx. I serve as co-chair of the 4201 Schools Association, and am joined today by the Association's co-chair, Antony McLetchie, Superintendent of the Rochester School for the Deaf. It is a pleasure for us to be with you today, and we are grateful for your continued support and friendship over the years.

Our eleven (11) not-for-profit state-supported schools serve children who are deaf, blind, or severely physically disabled across New York State. In recent years, many more of the children we now serve also have additional disabilities – either physical or in cognition.

We would first like to thank the Assembly and Senate for your longstanding support of our students and schools. Your work to maintain and increase state support for our schools each year is impactful for each of our schools around the State. We are truly grateful.

Like any school, the 4201 Schools need consistent, stable, and reliable funding to meet our students' needs. We request the Legislature's support for the following:

**GROWTH** – The Executive Budget proposes level funding for the 4201 Schools, which includes the \$1.5 million the Legislature supported in 2024.

We ask that our schools receive funding increases commensurate with aid increases provided to public schools. The Executive Budget proposes approximately \$37 billion in School Aid, an increase of \$1.7 billion or 4.7 percent. Our schools have never received an increase of this magnitude.

But additional support is necessary to meet the growing and diversifying needs of our student population:

- Many more of our students now have disabilities in addition to their primary diagnoses, requiring more intensive instruction and related

services.

- All of our schools now serve students and families who have recently arrived in the United States.
- Many of our students' families are of modest means.
- Many students are from homes in which English is not their first language.
- Our staff members are specially trained and certified, and our schools cannot adequately compete with salary levels that public schools offer professionals possessing the same qualifications.

**SALARY GROWTH & WORKFORCE RETENTION** - Our schools' staff members are specially trained and certified to work with children who are deaf, blind, or severely physically disabled. As stated above, salaries for our specially qualified staff lag those in public schools. We propose a new initiative to increase salaries for our teachers and professional staff:

- \$30 million program over three years to incrementally increase salaries to better compete with public school districts.

We are grateful for the *NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, & Asian Legislative Caucus's* support of this initiative again this year, in their annual ["The People's Budget"](#) package issued in December.

**FUND BALANCE** - We ask the Legislature to give our schools the authority to retain a small fund balance, like all other schools in New York.

It's important to allow our schools to prepare financially for variances or other contingencies (emergencies, planning for or adapting to student needs throughout the school year). The pandemic highlighted the need to give school leaders tools to adapt quickly maintaining fiscal stewardship of our operations.

And according to the State Comptroller, *"The practice of planning ahead and systematically saving for capital acquisitions and other contingencies is considered prudent management."*

**Mental Health** - The Executive Budget includes several initiatives to meet

the mental health needs of children (school-based health centers and mental health support grants). Our students bear the same mental health challenges as do students in other schools. Making our schools eligible for mental health support services that other schools receive would be a great benefit.

Capital Assistance - The Executive Budget also re-appropriates all three rounds of health and safety capital grants program approved in 2019, 2021 and 2024 (\$30 million each).

We appreciate and need this support as well. Our schools were established decades ago in communities around the State by philanthropic organizations, and most of our school buildings are now quite old. *(For example, the New York School for the Deaf was founded in 1817, the New York Institute for Special Education in 1831, and the Lexington School for the Deaf in 1864).* Our facilities are aging, and the needs of our students are changing quickly.

---

The 4201 Schools are proud to partner with New York State in ensuring high quality educational opportunity to students with low incidence disabilities. We take very seriously our responsibility to provide each of our students with a safe and healthy environment in which to learn, grow and succeed.

We are truly grateful for the state support championed by the Legislature and the Governor, that sustains our schools and the students we serve.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernadette M. Kappen, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, 4201 Schools Association  
Superintendent, New York Institute for Special Education



## The 4201 Schools Association

*Advocating for New York State's Blind, Deaf and Severely Physically Disabled Children*

For more than 200 years, the people of New York State have relied on the skills and expertise of the 4201 Schools to provide educational services to children who are deaf, blind and severely physically disabled. The Association represents 11 member schools across New York.

**Under Section 4201 of the Education Law,** the State has designated certain private non-profit schools to serve the special education needs of deaf, blind, physically disabled students or students with multiple disabilities. Students come to 4201 Schools upon application by their parents or school districts, and with the approval of the State Education Commissioner.

The leaders, teachers, counselors, therapists and all other support staff at each school are specialists in their field, and serve as a resource for policy makers, families, communities, and each other to encourage that best practices are utilized in the education of New York State students with low incidence disabilities. There are no charges or fees to parents for educational costs, transportation, room or board at 4201 schools. Our students benefit from the academic, life skills, vocational, and other specially designed programs available at our schools. Students also take part in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. 4201 Schools Association members are engaged in building opportunities for children by offering high-quality programs and through public awareness advocacy.

### The 4201 Schools Association: Who We Are

- Cleary School for the Deaf (Suffolk Co.)
- Henry Viscardi School (Nassau Co.)
- Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)
- Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)
- Mill Neck School for the Deaf (Nassau Co.)
- New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)
- New York School for the Deaf (Westchester Co.)
- Rochester School for the Deaf (Monroe Co.)
- St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)
- St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
- St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Erie Co.)



[www.4201schools.org](http://www.4201schools.org)



@4201Schools



@4201SchoolsAssociation

#