



January 29, 2025

**Testimony of Sydney Altfield, Executive Director, Teach NYS
Before the 2025 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education**

Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, 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 comprehensive needs of both the public and nonpublic school communities.

We know and appreciate the hardships faced by teachers, staff, and parents in all schools, especially the past few years. 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 education.

Today, we are here to address funding for nonpublic schools.

We are grateful for the Governor’s inclusion of \$85.5 million for the STEM reimbursement program in her proposed budget but unfortunately it is insufficient to meet the demand of the program. Because of the reimbursement program, our nonpublic schools have been able to hire certified STEM education teachers who teach our children the skills and means necessary to thrive in our technologically driven society. Despite growth, **the program is still underfunded**. In FY23, the state approved applications totaling \$133 million. We request that the “Mathematics, Science, & Technology Teachers” program **be increased to \$100 million** in the FY2026 budget to get closer to fully funding the program.

New York faith based communities are experiencing an unprecedented security challenge to protect the children, staff, and families attending nonpublic schools. In 2023, The FBI reported 961 hate crimes in **New York State** - the highest number on record an 84% jump from just five years ago. In New York State, the number of antisemitic hate crimes jumped to 446 - a 79% increase *from the prior year*. With the increased threat of attacks and extremist hate-crimes against both the Jewish and Muslim communities, it is incumbent on us to lead by taking preventive action to protect New Yorkers and make such institutions safer.

After the Hamas attack on October 7th, we surveyed Jewish schools about their security spending. The average respondent spent \$215,560 annually (\$598 per pupil) on security before October 7th, which increased to \$315,943 annually (\$854 per pupil) after the attack. This represents a 47% increase in average security spending. With its predictable funding allocation formula, flexibility of eligible uses, and streamlined application process, NPSE is the **single most effective health and safety program** for nonpublic schools in the country. In the wake of rising extremism and antisemitism, we request **funding for NPSE to be increased to \$90 million** to continue safeguarding all students.

We are encouraged by the recognition that hiring good, qualified teachers transforms the classroom experience and ask that the Senate and Assembly support increasing the Art and Music reimbursement program to \$15 million. Studies show that arts integration positively impacts student achievement. Incorporating arts and music into the curriculum not only inspires student creativity but allows for improved focus and concentration, social skills, and decision-making skills – to name a few.

The first round of applications was received by NYSED in August 2024. Preliminary analyses suggest that eligible schools submitted 300 applications for reimbursement totaling an estimated \$14 million. This demonstrates the major demand and need for this program – and its ability to incentivize schools to increase the number of hours dedicated to art and music taught by qualified teachers. \$15 million in funding for Arts and Music reimbursement would allow our nonpublic schools to hire qualified arts and music teachers and incorporate these important subjects into their day.

In addition, our nonpublic school community is in **full support of universal free school meals** for all students in the state. Good nutrition throughout the school day is a **key factor in student learning and growth**. Kids can't focus when they are hungry or lacking key nutrients – this is borne out by study after study. New York State needs to step in and help fill the gap to ensure no child is left hungry. We request the state create a truly **universal free lunch program** so that **ALL students can** reap the academic and health benefits.

Nonpublic schools are a major component of New York State's K-12 educational system. Roughly 1,700 nonpublic schools (both secular and religious) educate over 402,000 students. Not only do these schools educate students, but they also provide good jobs to workers across the state. In total, nonpublic schools provide 71,330 direct full-time-equivalent (FTE) jobs, paying workers nearly \$4.7 billion, and generating an economic output of \$4.4 billion for the state of New York. In addition, the schools generate another 17,340 FTE jobs for workers supporting nonpublic schools as suppliers, or for those creating goods and services for nonpublic school and supplier employees. Overall, nonpublic schools generate \$8.1 billion in economic activity in New York. This helps to generate \$665.1 million in tax revenues for the state and its localities.

Investing in nonpublic schools brings significant return on investment to the state. Again, we ask that state include **\$100 million for the STEM reimbursement program** and **\$15 million for the Arts and Music reimbursement program** to get use closer to fully funding these essential programs. We request **funding for NPSE to be increased to \$90 million** to ensure our children are safe at school amidst the concerning rise of hate-crimes and fully support a **universal free school meals program**. We want to ensure that our children receive a well-rounded, safe and quality education that develops their skills and prepares them for the future. Our state has made great strides in educational equity over the past decade. Let's not leave the nonpublic school community behind.