



January 29, 2026

**Testimony of Sydney Altfield, Chief Executive Officer, Teach Coalition
Before the 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education**

Good morning, 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 encouraged that the Governor included \$85.5 million for the STEM reimbursement program in her proposed budget – the same level as last year. 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. Schools are now offering new and more rigorous STEM courses like advanced placement statistics or robotics, while equipping them with the tools needed for the future. Furthermore, teachers report measurable improvement and follow-through of formerly struggling students in ways they never could before. These outcomes demonstrate that the program is not only meeting an urgent workforce need, but is transforming classroom instruction and expanding opportunity for students across the academic spectrum. 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.

We also ask that the Senate and Assembly increase funding the Art and Music reimbursement program to \$15 million. Studies show that arts integration positively impacts student achievement. 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 – although only \$5 million in funding was available. 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.

We are grateful for the governor’s inclusion of **\$90 million for the Nonpublic School Safety Equipment (NPSE) Grant program**, a \$20 million increase over last year. 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 \$250,000 annually (\$410 per pupil) on security before October 7th, which increased to \$488,000 annually (\$790 per pupil) during the current school year. This represents a 95% 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.

We request the legislature **fund the NPSE program at \$90 million** as the governor requested in her budget proposal.

We are also grateful to the Governor for including **\$240 million in the proposed budget for the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP) and Mandated Services Reimbursement (MSR)** programs, which reimburse nonpublic schools for the cost of administering state-required mandates and attendance reporting. These programs have been essential to ensuring that nonpublic schools can comply with state requirements without diverting scarce resources away from instruction.

However, because annual appropriations have not consistently met the State's full obligation, **a shortfall of approximately \$20 million has accumulated since 2019**, despite a partial one-time repayment in 2024.

We respectfully request that the legislature **fund the governor's budget request of \$240 million for CAP and MSR**, and include an **additional \$20 million to repay outstanding costs** incurred by nonpublic schools in recent years.

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.

Last year, New York State stepped in and help fill the gap to ensure no child is left hungry. We request the state continue offering **universal free meals** 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 **1,770 nonpublic schools** (both secular and religious) educate **over 375,000 students** - over 13% of the K-12 students in the state.

Not only do nonpublic schools educate students, but they also provide good jobs to workers across the state. Investing in nonpublic schools brings significant return on investment to 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.

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 ask the state to meet the governor's budget requests to **fund NPSE at \$90 million** to ensure our children are safe at school amidst the concerning rise of hate-crimes, and to fund **CAP and MSR at \$240 million** with an additional **\$20 million to cover shortfalls** from prior years. Finally, we ask the state to continue providing **universal free school meals** for all students.

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.