

2016 Issues Brief: Funding Our Schools

The 2016-17 NYS Executive budget proposals is a study in contrasts. Absent is the negative rhetoric that characterized last year's proposals. This year's budget is also introduced in a climate where new federal legislation, proposed Regents regulations and recommendations from the Governor's Common Core Task Force have introduced the promise of flexibility into the discussion of education reform. At the same time, funding of schools and the education department is insufficient. For the past eight years districts have filled gaps in state aid during a period of economic downturn in the state budget through program reduction and reserves depletion. With an improved economy and budget surplus, legislative priorities must turn to reimbursing districts for lost aid, demonstrating progress in honoring past commitments and supporting existing programs and regulations with adequate and equitable funding. NYS PTA maintains that a minimum increase of \$2.2 billion in local aid to schools will be necessary to address these priorities. Increased support and staffing essential to supporting education department leadership is also required. We seek support for proposals offered by the NYS Board of Regents, the NYS Educational Conference Board and NYS PTA that would:

- **Recognize the Impact of near Zero Tax Cap.** If the state's priority is to maintain the property tax cap, we believe the state has a responsibility to fund the \$700 million gap the calculated cap and the 2% limit generally understood by the public.
- **Assure Equity in Aid Distribution.** The GEA needs to be eliminated but high needs districts must be assured of equal percentage increases in foundation aid.
- **De-link APPR from State Aid.** The moratorium on use of test scores in APPR must be accompanied by a moratorium on state aid penalties until implementation stabilizes.
- **Supplement Support for Community Schools.** NYS PTA supports the \$100 million Executive proposal to create community schools but the funding is neither sufficient nor predictable. Grant funds need to be supplemented with accelerated phase-in of foundation aid in districts with struggling schools.
- **Support Unfunded Initiatives.** Professional development, multiple pathways to HS graduation and services for English Language Learners (ELLs) are all essential but without state funding, require districts to make choices between being out of compliance or cutting other programs.
- **Reject Education Tax Credits.** Tax Credit proposals divert funding from current commitments and should be considered only AFTER public schools are adequately and equitably funded.
- **Reject STAR Rebate proposals:** Proposed STAR rebate initiatives are likely to create confusion which is likely to result in school budget defeats.
- **Assure Adequate Support for State Education Department Operations:** Without adequate staff and budget, expectations of the education department are unrealistic. They also diminish the effectiveness of local initiatives supported with state aid and local tax dollars.

Now that the state has moved from coping with deficits to reporting annual surpluses, its first commitment needs to be to honor past commitments and adequately fund programs it expects school districts to make available to all the children of New York State.

Talking Points: Funding Our Schools

- **Recognize the Impact of near Zero Tax Cap.** Foundation aid must be increased by \$700 million to cover the difference between zero tax cap and a 2% tax increase.
- **Assure Equity in Aid Distribution.** The GEA must be eliminated and high needs districts must be assured a proportional foundation aid increase.
- **De-link APPR from State Aid.** State aid increases must not be held hostage to SED approval of APPR agreements.
- **Supplement support for Community Schools.** NYS PTA supports the Governor's \$100 million proposal to create community schools. Grant funds need to be supplemented with accelerated phase-in of foundation aid.
- **Support Unfunded Initiatives.** Professional development, multiple pathways to HS graduation and services for English Language Learners (ELLs) are all essential but without state funding, require districts to make choices between being out of compliance or cutting other programs.
- **Reject Education Tax Credits.** Tax Credit proposals divert funding from public schools and should be considered only AFTER public schools are adequately and equitably funded.
- **Reject STAR Rebate changes.** Proposed STAR rebate changes are likely to cause confusion that result in school budget defeats.
- **Assure adequate support for State Education Department Operations.** Current expectations of the education department are unrealistic due to inadequate staffing and budget.