

**Testimony to be presented to Deputy Secretary Manual Rivera and
Division of the Budget by
The New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers®
December 13, 2007**

Good morning. My name is Richard Longhurst. I am speaking for the New York State PTA. On behalf of our approximately 360,000 members I want to thank you for this opportunity to share our budget and legislative priorities for 2008. We encourage you to continue this sort of dialogue and invite our input as you address the challenges of developing a 2008 New York State Budget.

We first want to thank you for the courage, initiative and leadership reflected by the school finance reform provisions contained in this year's state budget. Continuing the multi-year funding strategy adopted this past year and the foundation approach to school funding that is at its core, is our first and highest priority. There is nothing more crucial to our children's educational success than the ability of our schools to plan over multiple years with adequate funding that is distributed in an equitable manner across the state. The achievement and well being of our children is also influenced, however, by a number of other factors that you can influence. We urge you to consider the following:

- Support continued review and updating of all the state's learning standards including those for the arts as proposed by Governor Spitzer this past year. Begin by asking what young people should know and be able to do if they are to succeed in college or the workplace.
- Provide funding to assure that parents and families are fully informed partners in the education process. Likewise, we ask you to fund pre-service and in-service strategies to assure that teachers are trained to meaningfully engage parents and families. Education cannot be just a creature of the classroom. Research shows that success is greatest when teachers, families and communities work together to achieve success.
- Assure professional development funding for district educators as well as funding for the education department to facilitate, support and lead that effort.
- Support adequate funding for the ongoing maintenance and modernization of school facilities. We cannot afford to let competing needs ever result in facility neglect.
- Expand funding for universal pre-kindergarten programs while providing funding flexibility to recognize that pupil needs differ across the state as do school resources such as space and staffing. In some instances, collaborative relationships with other public and private programs may represent the most effective approach.

- Remove State support for special education students served in public settings from the foundation formula and fund these costs separately. Costs to adequately serve special education students in public settings vary too much from student to student, from year to year and from district to district to be included in a foundation formula that tends to treat all special ed students alike.
- Recognize that a high school program, by itself, may no longer provide assurance of career success by attending to the quality of our public university system and making post high school academic, career and technical education affordable for all who pursue it.
- Use the Contract for Excellence concept to shape best practices and accountability standards for all districts while recognizing that the program is a work-in-progress and may need to be modified to assure that contracts improve results for districts in greatest need without draining resources or services to the remaining 92% of the schools in NYS.
- While we support efforts to encourage and develop promising new ideas that can benefit all schools, we urge that you not support proposals such as vouchers, tax credits or new charter schools if they divert essential funds from public efforts.
- Our classrooms are becoming more diverse with increased numbers of children coming to school with limited English language skills. We ask you to expand investment in programs that promote success among English Language Learners.
- Promote consensus on a Healthy Schools initiative that establishes and funds rigorous standards for child nutrition and physical activity in school settings.
- Protect our students not only from bullying and violence in school but also acts and portrayals of bullying and violence in electronic communications, the internet and in video games.
- Use your influence as State leaders to urge our congressional representatives in Washington to live up to the federal funding commitments for IDEA and NCLB.

At a time when state leaders are estimating a 2008 structural budget deficit that could exceed four billion dollars, we recognize that difficult choices will be necessary. Since 1897, PTA has existed as the only statewide volunteer parent organization that exists solely to advocate for the health, wellness and education of children. We have much to offer the education process and seek a formal advisory role in any collective effort to improve educational opportunity for the children of New York State. We again commend you for the courage and skill that we know will be required to craft a successful budget and urge you to establish education as the state's highest priority by honoring and building on the remarkable commitments of this past year. Thank you.