

Talking Points: Safeguard Mandates

- Governor Paterson declared that state mandates are too high and should be relieved. He urges that we act on the full recommendations for a property tax cap, despite much opposition, and mandate relief of the Commission on Property Tax Relief.
- Mandates are often not recognized for the protections they often ensure. As strong advocates for the education and well-being of all children, NYS PTA members have supported the implementation of many mandates that ensure that the learning needs of all students are met and that education is delivered in a healthy, safe environment by highly qualified professionals.
- Recommendations the Commission has targeted to enhance service delivery through local and regional collaboration are well-intended. Some that provide for the reduction of paperwork and redundant compliance reporting are welcomed by administrators and staff.
- A number of the Commission's recommendations that change regulations or requirements from mandates to guidelines undermine programs and services intended to protect and support students. Recommendations to remove the requirement for personnel training, such as safety training of bus drivers and monitors and mentoring of new teachers; that afford flexibility to health and safety mandates for defibrillators and for compliance with environmental regulations are all in conflict with PTA positions. Check *Where We Stand* www.nyspta.org under Advocacy, Legislative Program
- Mandates are critical for our most vulnerable populations.
- Particularly troubling are recommendations that could dilute special education services.
 - Recommendations to eliminate group size requirements and minimum service levels as well as maximum caseloads for consultant teachers, resource room and speech and language providers could potentially weaken the effectiveness of services for students with disabilities. Current numbers are based on best practices and informed policy decisions. Upon implementation, adequate staffing and delivery of services would fall prey to fluctuating district revenues and pressures to shift funding to more popular program areas. If needed, options for waivers already exist
 - Suggested changes to the requirements of the composition of CSE/CPSE seem unfounded. Under current law the participation of an additional parent member is mandated and the parent of the student has the option to waive this requirement. Elimination of this requirement is in conflict with our NYS PTA position to urge the legislature to maintain the mandate for an additional parent member and provide funding for parent training. A parent member who has been through the CSE process can be of invaluable assistance to a parent of a child being evaluated and provides important support.
 - The commission's recommendation to reduce the number of students classified should be based on criteria beyond numbers or percentages. Criteria should include high levels of poverty, homelessness, children in foster care, and English language learners where there is a tendency to higher numbers of classified students because of socio-economic issues.
- NY's special education services extend beyond federal requirements in over 200 areas. Federal mandate requirements are the minimum that can be offered to our children. We cannot settle for minimums, we must instead aim for maximum benefit. While there are surely instances of over-identification or inappropriate classification, this is the exception not the rule. We cannot allow opinions, numbers, or cost dictate the approach we take to deliver quality educational services to our special needs children. Investing in early intervention and best practices will pay dividends for all.