

## Talking Points: Invest in Education, Sustain our Communities, Ensure the Future

- Governor Cuomo’s claim that New York’s schools are #34 (or # 40) in performance outcomes is based on an archaic measure (percentage of people in the State who hold a high school diploma) of education attainment. As reported by Education Week’s highly regarded study, *Quality Counts Report*, New York ranks #2 (along with Massachusetts) in the nation in performance and policymaking, a summary of six ranking categories.
- Rather than blame education “spending” for increases in property taxes, State decision makers must recognize:
  - The “cost” of education is high - there is nothing in the governor’s plan that controls cost
  - The State does not pay a fair share of education costs. Added to reductions in the foundation aid formula of \$680 million dollars over the past two years, the loss of State Aid to education will total more than \$2.1 billion dollars. The State’s share of education costs has declined.
- The governor’s proposed 2011-2012 Executive Budget includes a 7.3% reduction (\$1.53 billion) in education funds. This is the largest dollar reduction in state aid in New York’s history.
- The \$19.3 billion in education aid actually falls below the 2006-2007 funding levels determined by the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* court decision to be *inadequate* to provide every child a “sound basic education.”
- The governor’s financial proposal will disproportionately harm our most vulnerable communities, i.e. the low income/high needs school districts.
  - Because a larger percentage of their budgets are supported by state aid, the multi-year Gap Elimination Assessment (GEA) actually reduces these vulnerable districts by more dollars than wealthy districts less dependent on state aid. Low income/high need districts have no tax base to make up the difference.
  - The governor proposes \$500 million in competitive grants to schools to raise student achievement and/or administrative efficiencies. Low income and poor districts do not have the funds or capacity to fairly compete for these grants, enhancing the gap between poor and wealthy districts. There is no allocation of these funds in the governor’s budget. Even if planning one year out, where will they come from?
- Tapping school district coffers, then capping school district “tax levies” is a top-down approach with education decisions being orchestrated by the Executive Office. “Tap and Cap” measures:
  - Do NOT solve the state’s fiscal problems – they raise no revenues.
  - Limit the school district “tax levy” increase (revenue minus expenses) at 2% or the CPI, whichever is less. The cap does not allow for increases in school district contractual benefits, heating/energy increases, and other mandated costs and does NOT limit the tax rate increase. Since these expenditures must still be paid and tax payers will pick up the additional burden.
  - Are undemocratic – they remove a community’s right to determine its investment in their schools. To invest above the 2% cap requires a 60% voter override. This gives control of community decisions to the minority as the override can be defeated by 40% of voters.
  - Ignore policy changes/legislation under the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) that call for increased rigor in learning standards, improved assessments, longitudinal data collection systems and reform of teacher/principal evaluations, and come with a price tag far beyond the federal allocations. Absent significant mandate relief or restoration of state aid, these requirements will force cuts in school staffing and programs and could dismantle any gains in academic achievement.
- The governor advises schools to use reserves to fill budget gaps but will not do so for the State.
  - The purpose of school district reserves is to have funds available for emergencies (building, heating repairs) and unanticipated costs, such as costly student services.
  - Reserves are important to school district financial profiles – keeping interest rates down on borrowing and debt service. The governor won’t compromise this for the State, so why ask our schools to do so?
- Although the governor has appointed a Commission to examine mandate relief, his proposal does not include any recommendations for significant relief. Mandate relief recommendations are being considered by the Board of Regents but it is uncertain that many would amount to any significant savings. Increased federal support through IDEA and Title I funding is needed.
- We cannot cut or cap our way to excellence! The governor and our state legislators must: address mandate relief (state and federal) that provides substantive relief, not token relief; implement measures that encourage, not cap, civic participation and responsibility; restore funding to meet our State and individual responsibility to provide increased opportunity, not diminished opportunity, for every child to reach their potential.