



# LEGISLATIVE BRIEFS...

March 2011

## **NYS Legislature Holds Hearings on Governor Cuomo's Proposed Budget for Education**

The New York State Legislature held public hearings on the Executive Budget proposal throughout the month of February. In response to continuing economic stagnation and budget shortfalls, every agency in the State addressed spending cuts and the Department of Education was no exception.

More than 20 witnesses – including New York State Education Department Commissioner David Steiner and New York City Department of Education Chancellor Cathleen Black – discussed Governor Cuomo's proposed reductions in school aid at the education hearing on February 15.

Many of those testifying said that the reductions will widen the funding gap between wealthier and poorer school districts. They argued that the Governor's proposed cuts would effectively wipe out funding increases mandated by the settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's lawsuit to force the state to give more money to schools.

Governor Cuomo maintains that his proposed reductions to school aid are calculated through a progressive formula. He believes that reserves and leftover stimulus money provide a sufficient cushion for school districts. He also encourages districts to pool resources and cut non-classroom expenditures, like information technology services, transportation, food services and facilities maintenance, to save money.

A statewide poll conducted by Siena College found that nearly two-thirds of respondents opposed the Governor's school-aid cuts. No other spending reduction in the proposed budget drew as much opposition.

- <http://assembly.state.ny.us/Press/20110214/>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/15/nyregion/15schools.html>

## **Legislation Proposed to Freeze Charter School Funding**

Last year, when Governor Paterson vetoed legislation affecting education aid, he inadvertently lifted the freeze on per-pupil assistance paid by school districts to charter schools. This cost was frozen when districts created their budgets, so they now need to send considerably more money per student to charter schools than had been allocated.

Legislation has been introduced in the Assembly and the Senate (A.4975, S.2007) that would extend the freeze on per pupil charter school payments and maintain payments at the current level for the City School District of Albany. Albany, which funds a disproportionate percentage of Charter schools, would see a 20 percent increase in payments to Charters at a time when public schools are bracing for further reductions in state aid. For more information go to:

- <http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/A-cold-bill-for-Albany-charters-1022959.php>
- [http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default\\_fld=&bn=A04975%09%09&Summary=Y&Memo=Y](http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?default_fld=&bn=A04975%09%09&Summary=Y&Memo=Y)

## **Obama Seeks to Pass DREAM Act**

President Obama vowed to work with Congress to pass the DREAM Act to provide a path to citizenship for children of illegal immigrants. The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act was first introduced ten years ago in the U.S. Senate. It was re-introduced in 2009 and passed by the House of Representatives, but was blocked by a Senate filibuster on December 18, 2010.

Obama called this one of his biggest disappointments and used his 2011 State of the Union address to call for justice for the children of immigrants:

“Today, there are hundreds of thousands of students excelling in our schools who are not American citizens. Some are the children of undocumented workers, who had nothing to do with the actions of their parents. They grew up as Americans and pledge allegiance to our flag, and yet live every day with the threat of deportation.”

Under the rigorous provisions of the DREAM Act, qualifying undocumented youth would be eligible for a six-year long conditional path to citizenship that requires completion of a college degree or two years of military service.

The bill would provide conditional residency to certain illegal and deportable alien students who graduate from U.S. high schools and are of good moral character. The students must have arrived in the U.S. illegally as minors and have been in the country continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment.

For further information go to:

- <http://dreamact.info/>
- <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/105288/20110126/immigration.htm#ixzz1Ezb3tbip>

## **Safeguard PIRC Funding Through the End of Fiscal Year 2011**

On February 19, 2011, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a Continuing Resolution (CR), to take effect March 4, 2011 and fund government operations through the end of the fiscal year. The CR includes not only unprecedented cuts to education funding – a more than \$10 billion overall decrease – but also the proposed elimination of PIRCs (Parent Information Resource Centers), the ONLY federal funding stream dedicated to engaging parents and families in the education of their children.

There is at least one PIRC in every state and territory. This proposed program elimination affects all PTAs and all parents. Without inclusion of PIRC funding in the FY2011 CR, the sole funding stream for family engagement would disappear, halting all PIRC program operations. PTA members were asked to tell Congress that continued program funding is not a luxury, but a necessity; when parents are engaged in education, our nation's students reap the benefits. Watch for future calls to action.

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