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THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Testimony Presented to
Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Hearing on FY 2020-21 Executive Budget

February 11, 2020

Albany, New York

Cleary School for the Deaf (Nesconset)
Henry Viscardi School (Albertson)
Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)
Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)
New York Institute for Special
Education (Bronx)

New York School for the Deaf (White Plains)
Rochester School for the Deaf (Rochester)
St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)
St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Buffalo)

The 4201 Schools Association represents ten (10) not-for-profit state-supported schools serving students who are deaf, blind and severely physically disabled throughout New York State. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the 2020-21 Executive Budget as it relates to issues impacting our students.

The 4201 Schools Association would like to thank the Legislature for your longstanding support of our students. We appreciate the \$1 million increase in support of our students provided last year. This represents the 5th year of increases the past nine (9) years. While the increase does not reflect parity with the growth provided to public school districts nor the growth extended to the 853 sector, we are grateful that the Legislature continues to value our schools and the services we provide to our students. We hope to see continued growth this year more in line with other special education providers.

GROWTH ON 10 MONTH PROGRAMS						
YEARS	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
4201 Schools	\$0/0%	2.4%	2.34%	\$2.29%	2.24%	0.95%
853 Schools	3.8%	4%	4%	4%	3.4%	3.6%

The SFY 2020-21 Executive Budget proposes level funding for our schools:

- \$93.7 million - up to \$84.7 million of which is available to reimburse school districts for the tuition costs of students attending our schools, and \$9 million for remaining allowable purposes, such as the education of deaf children under the age of 3 years and residential facilities.
- \$10.2 million in direct support to our schools.

We are pleased that the Executive Budget continues each of the previous investments. The continuation of the increases by the Executive enables our schools to invest in our teachers and professional staff with confidence. Combined, these investments have increased our base funding of \$10.2 million. The state's total investment in our schools reflects slightly over 2008-09 levels, when our funding was cut in deficit reduction measures.

We are also grateful that last year the Executive proposed - and the Legislature approved - \$30 million funding to support health and safety capital projects. The process for accessing the program has just been issued. We appreciate the work of the New York State Education Department and Division of the Budget for their time in developing the program and look forward to applying. These funds are greatly needed as our campuses have significant projects that otherwise could not be addressed, such as boiler or roof repairs, window replacement, and security equipment.

SPECIALIZED WORKFORCE

Providing high quality instruction to students with low-incidence disabilities like deafness, blindness and severe physical disabilities requires highly trained teachers certified in specialized areas, such as general certified special education teachers and certified teacher for the deaf or certified teacher for the blind. These uniquely and specially qualified professionals are rare. In addition, our schools must provide the IEP services necessary for access. Clinical professionals – such as speech language pathologists, mobility specialists, and physical therapists, for example – must be trained to provide services with students with communication challenges. These professionals are also few in number across the state, and sought after by other schools and special education providers who are able to better compensate them.

We are significantly challenged by our inability to compensate our staff at the same level as the public sector. As such, we experience a high rate of teacher and clinical staff turnover. In addition, we have vacancies in key instructional and therapeutic areas for too long.

We hope to engage with the Legislature on strategies for increasing support of our teachers and clinical professionals. We recognize that in order to close the gap, a sizable investment will need to be made and this may require multiple years of targeted supports. We hope to have the opportunity to work with you towards a viable solution.

LONG-TERM CAPITAL NEEDS

Our schools were established decades ago in communities around the State by philanthropic organizations, and most of our school buildings are now older (For example, the New York School for the Deaf was founded in 1817, the New York Institute for Special Education in 1831, and the Lexington School for the Deaf in 1864). Our facilities are aging and the



needs of our students are changing.

While the capital funding will be helpful to address immediate health and safety issues, we continue to request the opportunity to engage existing *Dormitory Authority* authorization for another series of long-term major capital projects. We request that the bonding cap be raised to \$100 million to allow for another round of DASNY projects.



If authorized this year, our schools could begin the laborious process of developing construction plans and seek approval by NYS Education Department and the Division of the Budget for projects.

SMART SCHOOLS BOND ACT UPDATE

We remain grateful to the Legislature for including our schools in the Smart Schools Bond Act of 2014 (Total of \$5 million to support 853s, Special Acts and 4201 schools). Each of our schools has worked to apply for and receive support under this important program. Seven of our schools used these funds to increase classroom technology. Others used the funding to support security equipment. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the program.

CONCLUSION

The 4201 schools are proud to be a partner with New York State in ensuring high quality educational opportunities to students with low incidence disabilities. We take very seriously our responsibility to provide each of our students with a safe and healthy environment by which to grow and succeed. We appreciate the support provided that makes our schools a reality to the students we serve across the state. Thank you.

Submitted by,

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