



Testimony of

*New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers
(NYS Parent Teacher Association)*

*By Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, Esq.
Executive Director*

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I am Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, the Executive Director of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA), and am proud to represent nearly 300,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents of 2.6 million New York school children.

NYS PTA appreciates the opportunity to comment on how the Executive Budget impacts children and families statewide.

Thank you to Assembly Education Chairwoman Catherine Nolan, Senate Education Chair Carl Marcellino and members of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees for your continued commitment to ALL children, their families, and our schools.

From outstanding arts and music programs, to broader pathways to graduation, to increases in community schools and supports for our English Language Learners (ELLs) and Students with Disabilities – New York’s children, educators, and schools continue to succeed.

However, challenges are real too. According to the latest NYS School Report Card, 55% of our students are economically disadvantaged and more than 50% qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. Our schools welcome increasing numbers of ELLs (up by more than 1% from the prior year), some with interrupted formal education, some as unaccompanied minors. More than 100,000 students are homeless or living in temporary housing. More than 200 districts show enrollment growth with limited increases in resources. The need for mental health services continues to increase, especially with rises in school violence, heroin and opioid use. Students continue to have increasing special needs.

Success is achieved where supports for specialized learning environments with family and community engagement are present and stable from year to year. Children’s needs don’t disappear from year to year, and we cannot fund schools as if they do.

Despite these challenges, our New York schools continue to do more for our children, working each day to make every child’s potential a reality. The need to provide students and schools with adequate, stable resources, programs and services grows, especially this year, with real federal uncertainties.

EDUCATION ISSUES

School Aid

While we acknowledge the predicted state deficit, and challenges posed by federal uncertainties, the constitutional obligation to fund a high-quality education for each and every New York student remains. Unfortunately, state aid as allocated in the Executive Budget proposal, is woefully insufficient to address student need - especially when considering deferred maintenance, and program and personnel elimination stemming from years of the Gap Elimination Adjustment and low tax cap levies.

While the \$338 million increase in Foundation Aid, \$317 million allocation for expense-based aid, and the \$64 million in unallocated school aid through the Fiscal Stabilization Fund is a good starting point for negotiations, we are concerned that this is seriously short of the \$2.0 billion school aid increase called for by NYS PTA.

The Executive Budget school aid allocation generally includes an increase of \$769 million:

- \$338 million as an increase in Foundation Aid, with a \$50 million community schools set-aside within the Foundation Aid increase
- \$317 million for expense-based aids, which represent full funding of expense-based aids
- \$64 million for a “Fiscal Stabilization Fund”

- \$10 million for the “Empire State After-School Program”
- \$15 million to expand pre-kindergarten for three and four-year olds
- \$9 million to expand Early College High Schools
- \$6 million for Smart Start
- \$5 million for Breakfast After the Bell
- \$2.5 million for expanded access to advanced placement
- \$2.5 million in other education initiatives

Preserving current services for our students must be a state priority, and according to conservative calculations by the Educational Conference Board (ECB), **a \$1.5 billion increase is needed just to keep our schools at the same level of programs and services for students as last year.**

Therefore, NYS PTA supports the continued call for a school aid increase of \$2.0 billion, to include:

- \$1.5 billion to continue current school services and programs; and
- \$500 million to address priorities including support for struggling schools, support for English Language Learners, expansion of college and career pathways and support for Career and Technical Education programs, expansion of pre-kindergarten for both three and four-year olds, teacher professional development, and support for school districts with growing enrollment.

NYS PTA strongly supports a commitment to fully phase in the previously promised Foundation Aid of \$4.2 billion over the next two years. The overwhelming majority of these funds - \$3.03 billion – are due to high-needs school districts and students. A commitment must be made to both update and fully phase in the foundation aid, with a special focus on revisiting formulas for poverty, and other critical factors such as percentage of students with disabilities and English Language Learners, and geographic sparsity and enrollment growth. ALL students, and especially in our high-needs schools, need adequate support.

We strongly oppose the proposed cap on expense-based aids. Expense-based aids are a critical and necessary funding stream for many schools – especially since many school buildings are old, and in dire need of repair. Replacing outdated buses, repairing plumbing and heating, and updating equipment is absolutely necessary, as schools deferred these and other expenses during the Gap Elimination Years. To cap promised reimbursement on this spending breaks the fundamental funding contract with our state leaders. These expenses are essential, not selective.

Tax Cap Reforms Needed

For the past years, the tax cap levy limit for many school districts has been devastatingly low, and districts have been forced to make difficult budgeting choices in attempts to save programs and services for students.

We were disheartened with the recent gubernatorial veto of legislation that would enable exclusion of BOCES capital expenses from tax cap calculations, and include Payments in Lieu of Taxes in growth factor determinations.

BOCES programs provide great economies of scale and cost savings for school districts, and the exclusion of BOCES capital expenses from an individual district tax cap calculation penalizes both the school district for fiscal responsibility and the BOCES and their students themselves.

The previously enacted law permitted these common sense modifications, however the regulations to implement these provisions have never been drafted. There is renewed need for re-introduction and passage of the mandatory legislation.

NYS PTA continues to support common sense tax cap reform, that includes;

1. Changing the allowable levy limit **to at least two percent or CPI, whichever is greater;**
2. Elimination of the supermajority requirement and the possibility of negative tax levy limits;
3. Allowing for exemptions like enrollment increases; and
4. Implementation of tax cap corrections which the legislature and Governor have already approved including: excluding BOCES capital expenses from calculations and including Payments in Lieu of Taxes in growth factor determinations.

English Language Learners and their Families

New York State has long been the gateway for immigrant success where economic and social success relies on an educated, globally aware citizenry, prepared to address the issues of an ever-changing world.

Adequately supporting ELL students and their families continues to be a challenge for many districts and communities, as they try to provide increased services and supports for all students while juggling limited state resources, bound by a tax levy limit that has been devastatingly low for the past few years.

Therefore, we ask that you continue to consider:

1. Additional dedicated funding for ELL students, especially for school districts experiencing high density populations of diverse language speakers;
2. Improved current aid to address mid-year influxes of unaccompanied minor students, and increased support for districts with high unaccompanied minor populations;
3. Fiscal support for and examination of Part 154 implementation and requirements;
4. Accelerated teacher training for all educators in supporting ELL students and their families, along with expedited certification of bilingual and TSOL educators;
5. Continued and increased support for the State Education Department Office of Family Engagement, with staff dedicated to support ELL students and families; and
6. Expansion of the state's capacity to provide translation and interpretation services, especially for key parent documents, to minimize local district impact.

Funding for Family Engagement

Family Engagement is a school-family partnership that raises student achievement, improves school and community relations, and increases public support for our schools.

We are especially pleased that the state has invested in the My Brother's Keeper program, and are encouraged by the new Office of Family Engagement at the State Education Department. Family engagement is also a critical element in the recently approved NYS Every Student Succeeds Act Plan.

However, this work is just beginning, and we ask for increased support for ALL schools or districts that want to improve their family engagement initiatives. We attached National PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, for your review.

The Education Department cannot succeed in this work alone, and we are happy to partner in this work. We ask that you consider funding to support for parent and family organizations that are already uniquely situated to foster meaningful family engagement efforts on a statewide basis, especially in the absence of federal grant programs.

Support for Community Schools

Community Schools are an effective strategy for student and family success, and often address the health, social, and socio-emotional needs of students and their families.

With fully phased-in Foundation Aid, more schools would be able to leverage resources to consider converting to a Community School. While there is a \$50 million set aside included in the Foundation Aid increase, we support increases in total Foundation Aid, alongside specific targeted aid for our state's struggling schools.

Further, ALL schools should be afforded the opportunity to transform schools into community hubs for learning and family support and funding for any school to support this model should be included in the final State Budget.

After School Care

NYS PTA supports the \$10 million allocation to fund the Empire State After-School Program to create approximately 6,250 after school seats in high-needs communities. Access to low cost or free high quality (preferable school-based) after school care for children is critical and must be supported and expanded. Consideration for before/after-care transportation support is essential as well.

Full-Day Kindergarten Conversion

There are still too many school districts without full-day kindergarten. In a time of fluctuating revenues, districts may be forced to offer half day or no kindergarten if they experience fiscal distress. We must not let this occur.

Therefore, we fully support the proposal and any needed allocation for additional full-day kindergarten conversion aid, to incentivize the last school districts with half-day kindergarten programs to establish full-day kindergarten programs in the 2018-19 school year.

Pre-Kindergarten

All children should have complete and equal access to high-quality pre-school educational opportunities. Parents and families play an integral role in pre-school education and high-quality programs must include attention to the unique developmental nature of the social/emotional, physical and academic experience of young children in a manner that addresses the whole child.

NYS PTA supports the \$15 million increase in pre-kindergarten funding to expand programming for three and four year olds. We also support the \$5 million for implementation of the QUALITYstarsNY program.

NYS PTA continues to call for true universal pre-kindergarten for all public school students, with necessary transportation funding.

Early College High Schools, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Access, and Career and Technical Education

By providing predictable funding for Early College High Schools, CTE and STEM programs, New York is investing in both the economic future of our state and our children, as more than 90 percent of CTE students graduate with a Regents diploma.

NYS PTA fully supports the \$9 million increase in funding to expand Early College High School programs targeted towards communities with low graduation or college access rates.

We also support the additional \$2 million to subsidize AP and IB exams for low-income students. For many students and families, the cost of taking an AP examination is prohibitive. This proposal would begin to level

the playing field and provide for appropriate assistance to low-income families to support children in their preparation for college and career.

Not included in the budget, however, is legislation to amend the current aid formula for both BOCES CTE programs and Special Services Aid, to provide for more fiscal support to critical CTE services. The BOCES formula hasn't been increased since 1990 and only provides aid for the first \$30,000 of a BOCES educator's salary. The corresponding Special Services Aid in the Big Five City School Districts also needs to be adjusted to reflect current labor figures. We fully support this inclusion.

Smart Start

We support the \$6 million for the new Smart Start program, to expand computer science and engineering education. Smart Start grants will provide teachers with resources and professional development, and schools which receive a grant award will work with their Regional Economic Development Councils.

Further, legislation is included which would enable a work group to create computer science standards to be available for any school to use. However, we would prefer funding for all to be available, as opposed to complete processes.

Charter Schools

NYS PTA appreciates any continued assistance to districts making payments to charters; however, we remained opposed to changes to and the weakening of rules governing charter schools, especially until real meaningful charter school accountability and transparency legislation is enacted.

We fully support a parent's decision to place their child in a charter school, but continue to be concerned with the charter industry under-serving students with disabilities and English Language Learners. We are also concerned with the imbalance between funding and supports for some co-located public and charter schools. Therefore, we recommend better oversight before any charter expansion is considered.

School Mental Health

We fully support the \$250,000 allocation to create mental health support grants for community schools, and call for more funding for this initiative.

It is of particular importance to have sufficient supports for children in schools. These critical support personnel include guidance counselors, health professionals such as school nurses, and licensed clinical social workers – who work not only to address mental health concerns, but also identify behavioral issues, and can be a positive support system for the academic system, family and community.

As example, social workers are trained in evidence-based individual, group and family counseling and have a unique perspective to view the child as part of a larger system to identify unmet physical and emotional needs, and can provide crisis intervention, conflict resolution, and social and emotional support to best meet the needs of children, youth and families.

Special Education Waivers

NYS PTA continues to oppose any proposal to allow school districts to apply for waivers from certain special education laws and regulations.

Federal and state special education requirements were enacted for sound purposes and our children must be adequately served and protected.

Teacher Programs

The “T” in PTA matters, and NYS PTA continues to support a renewed investment in continued professional learning, especially as New York begins to roll out the Next Generation State Standards, Arts and CTE Pathways, new mental health curriculum, the need for increased culturally responsive teaching practices, implementation of the newly approved ESSA plan, and the ever-changing technology landscape.

We also support the continuation of the Master Teachers Program at \$1 million and support the continuation of the Empire State Excellence in Teaching Award for \$400,000. We also ask for new investments to support the NYS Teacher of the Year program, and increases in funding for the Albert Shaker Grants and the National Board Certification program.

No Student Goes Hungry

We support the several new proposals in the Executive Budget to expand access to food for children:

- Breakfast After the Bell – We support this proposal, requiring schools with more than 70 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch to provide breakfast after the school day has begun, either breakfast in the classroom, extended cafeteria hours, and/or food kiosks and vending machines that dispense healthy breakfasts. We support the \$7 million in capital funds for equipment and \$5 million for reimbursement to schools for costs of increased numbers of meals served.
- Ban Lunch Shaming – We support legislation to ban lunch shaming practices in schools, prohibiting schools from serving an alternative lunch to children who cannot pay. We are concerned about the fiscal impact of this worthy legislation, and that may need to be addressed in expenditures.
- Farm to School Program – We support increases to the existing Farm to School grant program, from \$750,000 to \$1.5 million.
- Farm-fresh, locally grown foods at schools – We support increases in reimbursement for schools from \$0.06 per meal to \$0.25 per meal for any district that purchases at least 30% of its food from NY farmers.

One concern, however, is that schools would be required to purchase 30% of all its food from NY farmers, but only the reimbursement rate for lunch meals would be increased. **Thus, we ask for an amendment, adjusting this language to reflect that a school district would have to purchase 30% of its foods dedicated to lunch service to receive this increase reimbursement.**

Recovery High Schools

We fully support expansion and access to recovery high school programs, and support the proposal which authorizes BOCES non-component school districts, including the Big Five City School Districts, to participate.

Substance use disorders continue to be a real and critical concern, and as a community, we must do better to support our children and families in crisis.

Children and young adults in recovery are at high risk of relapse, especially as they return to their home/school environments. They go back to the people, places and things that often create triggers that can lead to using substances as a coping mechanism.

Recovery schools need to be in ALL communities, where students can develop sober support systems while working towards meeting educational requirements to earn their high school diploma. Recovery schools are

particularly important in communities where there are little to no alternatives for young people. The stress of school and being able to make friends without the peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors, is extremely important for youth who need to develop the skills to navigate the adolescent world. Many of these students also have co-occurring mental health disorders and as such, need to learn how to address the emotional turmoil with cognitive behavioral support. Funds need to be provided not just to school systems, but to OASAS licensed treatment programs to work together to meet the recovering needs of young people.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT

Excelsior Scholarships

NYS PTA supports expanded access and affordability to higher education for students and families, and supports the allocation to expand the Excelsior Scholarship program to families making \$110,000 annually.

NYS PTA also supports further expansion of this program, and would support universal higher education funding and tuition for all New York students.

Food Pantries on Campuses

NYS PTA fully supports the proposal to require SUNY and CUNY campuses to either provide physical food pantries or enable students to receive food through a different “stigma-free” arrangement.

As a part of the No Child Goes Hungry program, access to food pantries or other food programs is absolutely needed for all children and young adults – and SUNY and CUNY are uniquely positioned to support this work to address both food insecurities and hunger.

Student Loan Debt

NYS PTA supports the proposal to create a Student Loan Ombudsman at the Department of Financial Services.

We also support requiring all colleges to annually provide data on student loans, the prohibition of predatory practices or borrowers, and the prohibition of suspensions of professional licenses if the individual is behind or defaulted on a student loan.

Student loan debt is a real financial crisis for many students and families, often plunging young adults into significant debt to pay for higher education. We hope these programs, and others, will help.

SUPPORT FOR THE WHOLE CHILD

Regulate and Tax Electronic Cigarettes

NYS PTA fully supports the Executive Budget proposal which imposes an excise tax of 10 cents per fluid milliliter on vapor products at the distributor level.

We proudly supported the inclusion of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) in the Clean Indoor Air Act and the ban on their use on school grounds.

We continue to call for legislation, regulation and/or other national, state and local measures to strengthen the prohibitions on the sale, advertising and marketing of e-cigarettes and other ENDS to youth (18 years or younger). We also support increased educational programs and activities aimed at ending tobacco and e-cigarette use by youth.

Alarming, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that e-cigarettes and ENDS use among students in grades 6-12 tripled in one year's time and are the most commonly used tobacco products among youth. According to a report released just this past week from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, there is now substantial evidence the e-cigarette use can be "highly addictive" and teenagers that use these devices are at higher risk of smoking traditional tobacco products.

E-cigarettes and other ENDS are available in more than 7,000 fruit and candy flavors and use cartoons and celebrities, which are appealing to youth, in their advertising. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has taken the first step in establishing FDA oversight of e-cigarettes and other ENDS, much more needs to be done as there are no federal restrictions preventing the sale and advertising of e-cigarettes and other ENDS to minors.

Heroin and Opioid Epidemic and Recovery

Heroin and prescription opiates continue to devastate families and communities across New York State. Young people under the age of 25 and their families are particularly impacted. In the past years, New York State made addressing heroin and opiates a priority in both budget and legislation.

The Executive Budget implements an Opioid Epidemic Surcharge on manufacturers, which we support. The \$0.02 per morphine milligram will be placed on every first sale of opioid in NYS, and expected to generate \$125 million to support prevention and treatment efforts.

We also support the \$26 million increase (4.5%) in operating and capital support for OASAS for prevention, treatment and recovery programs, residential services and public awareness and education.

Further, we fully support continued expansion of Adolescent Clubhouses (Recovery Youth Clubhouses), and support the proposal for four new clubhouses – for a total of 15 statewide.

NYS PTA also supports the fully funded expansion of Recovery Community Organizations and Recovery Community Outreach Centers in all counties, and the expansion of fully funded Peer Engagement Specialists and Family Support Navigators (2 per county).

Youth Employment

The NYS PTA supports the increase to the New York Youth Jobs Program, which would increase the tax credit for businesses that employ children by 50%. We support direct programmatic funding for this initiative.

We also support the \$4 million increase to the Summer Youth Employment Program.

Extending funding for summer employment offers students great opportunity, and while the investment may be small, it is appreciated especially in our most challenged school districts where work-based opportunities and exposure may be limited.

Raise the Age/Juvenile Justice

The Executive Budget includes \$100 million for state and local costs to implement the new raise the age laws, including programs such as comprehensive diversion, probation, and other services for 16 and 17-year olds in the juvenile justice system. We fully support this allocation.

NYS PTA continues to support legislation that reforms the Juvenile Justice System. Most worrisome is the state of educational programs and opportunities in confinement institutions for both juveniles and adults. Access to a high-quality public education complete with academics, therapies and other supports must be a

priority for all children and adults who wish to complete their high school requirements or go on to pursue college or career training.

Many children in juvenile justice detention are not receiving adequate educational services, as discussed at the January NYS Board of Regents meeting. These shortfalls must be immediately remedied, and there must be increased oversight of the educational system in our facilities where children are housed.

Recidivism remains a critical concern, and adequate educational opportunities will only help young adults as they transition back to neighborhoods.

First 1,000 Days of Life

We support this new proposal, which will “expand access to services and improve health outcomes for children covered by Medicaid and their families.”

Finding new and unique ways to support ALL children, birth through adulthood, is critical to our mission and should continue to be a priority of New York State.

Conclusion

We need to continue to build the success of our community through investments and support for our key resource; our children. Every parent has a dream for their child. It is our job to be dream makers, and our schools need the necessary state support to bring those dreams closer to reality.

We humbly ask that you continue to advocate for infusing our schools with the tools and resources necessary to accelerate the success of our children and families. Together, we can make every child’s potential a reality. No other work is more important.