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SENATOR
FREDERICK J. AKSHAR II
52ND SENATE DISTRICT

PLEASE RESPOND TO:
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BINGHAMTON STATE OFFICE BLDG.
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September 3, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I'm writing on behalf of the 2.6 million students in New York State whose local schools will suffer massive staff layoffs, program & special education cuts and the possible elimination of in-person learning altogether, thanks to your administration's 20% cut in education funding.

While the state attempts to sort out its finances as the result of COVID-19 induced revenue shortfalls, local boards of education, superintendents, teachers, parents, and taxpayers across our state's 62 counties are all scrambling to adapt to your sweeping cuts while still providing the educational opportunities that every New York student deserves. Your administration's last-minute cut has made that impossible. I know this because I'm on the ground speaking with these stakeholders every day and I'd urge you to do the same.

In one school district, we're told they may be forced to lay off 150 teachers and staff amounting to 35% of their employees. That will have a devastating impact not only on the families of those losing their jobs, but on the school's ability to serve their students and threaten their capacity to reach their full potential.

I recently spoke with Rachel Murat, the 2020 Teacher of Year who expressed deep concerns regarding the lack of face to face teaching this school year. We've fought hard to limit the spread of COVID-19 and our school districts presented plans to keep their students safe while offering the best education possible.

It's a slap in the face that they might not return to school this year due to budgetary constraints. I've long said that for some children, being in school is the only sense of normalcy they have in their lives and this will effectively cut off that helping hand for kids in need.

If you believe teachers are essential and students are essential, then we can't wait on the federal government to save the day. We need action now. That's why we need to look within to find creative savings and fully fund our schools.



As New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli's recent report outlined, New York's economic development efforts over the past several years have been either questionable, ill-advised or poorly managed at best. I strongly suggest that we temporarily suspend bonding for economic development projects and instead establish a bond that would make our schools whole and fully functional. I believe that our children's education is a far better investment in our state's economic future than any number of Empire State Development (ESD)'s speculative projects.

Government often picks the winners and loser and sadly, our children are coming out the losers because of a budget that didn't prioritize wants versus needs. Now is the time to create this program and get schools the funding they need to operate successfully.

Our state must make every effort to prioritize and support the best tool we have to create prosperity for individual New Yorkers, their families and our communities — education.

I stand ready to work with you and I appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'FJ Akshar II', with a large, stylized flourish underneath.

Frederick J. Akshar II
New York State Senator

FJA/blf

CC: Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie