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ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS
DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE LEADER



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March 24, 2014

Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor State of New York
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Honorable Dean Skelos
Temporary President, New York State Senate
Room 330, Capitol
Albany, New York 12247

Honorable Jeffrey Klein
Temporary President, New York State Senate
Room 432, Capitol
Albany, New York 12247

Honorable Sheldon Silver
Speaker, New York State Assembly
Room 932, Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Dear Governor Cuomo, Co Coalition Leaders Skelos and Klein, and Speaker Silver:

For the last five years, school districts across the state have been forced to achieve increased efficiency while cutting services and personnel, including the elimination of 35,000 teachers and other educators statewide. Despite a steady increase in costs, many school districts are forced to operate on less aid than in 2008-2009 due to the impact of the Great Recession. Since that time every school district in this state has seen a reduction in school aid, as part of the comprehensive balancing of the State budget, through the gap elimination adjustment (GEA).

Over the last three budget cycles there has been an attempt to restore funding for high need districts. This year's Executive Budget continues this restoration. However, the fiscal stress and Common Core requirements that these school districts face demands additional resources. Inadequate funding is especially devastating in high and average need districts where poverty is high and student needs are greater. Currently, there is almost a \$9,000 per pupil spending gap

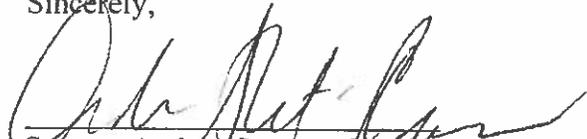
between wealthy and poor school districts, which leads to a disparity in achievement opportunities for students in those districts.

The Big Four City School districts continue to be challenged by these downward adjustments to state funds. Moreover, the upstate small city and rural districts are dramatically hurt by the GEA and reductions in school aid. They -- and the property taxpayers that support them -- continue to operate with state aid levels at or below 2008, and are under great fiscal stress. All the districts desperately need the GEA eliminated as well as increases in aid higher than that included in the Senate Budget resolution.

The Budget must recognize and adequately address issues regarding funding education from universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) all the way through college. The overall State Aid proposal should provide an increase to Foundation Aid and Gap Elimination Adjustment restoration. The increase should target GEA restorations to average need, high need urban suburban and high need rural school districts with specific increases for the Big Four City school districts. Finally, Foundation Aid increases must primarily target high need school districts.

We encourage you to fund education in a manner that ensures all the children in the State will reap the benefits.

Sincerely,



Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Democratic Conference Leader



Senator Neil Breslin



Senator Terry Gipson



Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson



Senator Timothy Kennedy



Senator George Latimer



Senator Ted O'Brien



Senator Cecilia Tkaczyk

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