

# KEEP THE PROMISE ON EDUCATION

## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Keep the Promise on Education: Assembly Education Budget Gets Passing Grade; Senate Budget Fails**

### **Education Groups Support Income Tax Hike on Millionaires to Fully Fund Education**

#### *Assembly Education Chair Nolan Calls for Full Funding of Education Promise*

Albany, NY - A coalition of education and community organizations offered their assessments of the Assembly and Senate Education Budgets at a press conference at the Legislative Office Building today, they were joined by Assembly Education Committee Chair Catherine Nolan (D-Queens). The organizations praised the Assembly budget for adding \$300 million in basic classroom operating aid, also called foundation aid, to the budget proposed by the governor. This funding would be distributed through the new school aid formula adopted last year as part of the historic statewide settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. This formula distributes school aid based student need, rather than the traditional system of distributing aid based upon political considerations. By contrast the Senate plan only adds \$47 million in foundation aid statewide and adds \$140 million through two extra formulas that are not based on student or district need and designed to meet the political demands of the Long Island Senate delegation to receive a predetermined share of state school aid. The organizations also praised the Assembly for proposing a stable source of revenues to fund education and other budget items through a 1% tax increase on incomes over \$1 million annually.

"The Assembly remains committed to keeping the promise to provide long awaited funds to school children across New York State. The fate of our state is intricately tied to the type of education we provide our children. More than a generation of children have been shortchanged by our educational system. Calling on those who earn a million dollars or more – that's \$20,000 a week -- to do a little bit more during these difficult economic times is a way to ensure all children receive the sound basic education that is their right. We call on the Senate and the Governor to ensure this critical revenue source is available to help keep the promise," said Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan, chair of the Assembly Education Committee.

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“The Assembly keeps the promise to school kids upstate and downstate through fixing the school aid formula and restoring \$300 million in basic classroom aid,” said Billy Easton, Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education. “They have a responsible plan to provide the needed revenues by asking millionaires to pay a small 1% increase in their taxes. By contrast the Senate Majority diverts money that should be going upstate into wealthy suburban districts and uses Ouija Board accounting to come up with the revenues. In addition, the Assembly makes New York City pay its fair share of school costs, while the Senate lets Mayor Bloomberg off the hook.”

“After thirteen years of litigation, CFE established the constitutional right to a sound basic education and the state obligation to ensure adequate resources to make that right real. New York State officials legislated promises over the last two years to provide classroom and building aid to fully fund that right. CFE supports the Assembly's budget that keeps the promise and restores the aid to improve academic excellence and provides necessary revenues through a 1% surcharge on the income of those who make over \$1 million a year. The Assembly demonstrates that we do not have to solve our economic problems on the backs of high needs kids. A generation of kids has already paid with their futures. We teach our children to keep their promises and we expect nothing less from our public officials,” said Geri D. Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE).

The Assembly and Senate both passed their education budgets on March 12, the same day that former Governor Spitzer announced his resignation. The proposed education budgets normally receive significant media scrutiny, but this year they have largely slipped under the radar screen.

Key Provisions in the budget bills are as follows:

#### **Assembly A. 9807B**

- Adds \$300 million in basic classroom operating aid (foundation aid) to the governor's budget for a \$1.2 billion statewide increase. These funds are for smaller classes, after school programs, middle school and high school reform and other best practices.
- Adds foundation aid for high need and high and average wealth school districts upstate, downstate and in New York City.
- Fine tunes the formula for dividing foundation aid between districts to increase fairness for high need rural, suburban and urban districts state-wide
- Sticks to the basic principles of CFE of fairness, predictability and accountability

#### **Senate S. 4655**

- Only adds \$47 million in basic classroom operating aid (foundation aid), falling \$300 million short of the promise.
- Instead of adding funds through the fair foundation formula the Senate adds \$140 million in so called "high tax aid" and "supplemental public excess cost aid" which are designed to continue unfair distribution of school aid by favoring wealthy suburban districts at the expense of needy districts.
- Adds \$118 million in grant funds for New York City outside the foundation formula.
- Does not institute reforms based upon CFE principles of fairness, predictability and accountability.
- Emphasizes adding non-formula aid for downstate suburbs and for New York City, but adds very little aid for upstate school districts.

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"Despite these tough fiscal times, it is imperative that we increase our investment in preparing a workforce that can effectively compete in a global market," stated Glynda C. Carr, Executive Director of Education Voters of New York. "We must protect our state's most valuable resource--public education. The Assembly's education budget bill not only fully restores the operating aid promised last year but also recommends a smart and fair way to raise revenue and offset cuts. The Assembly budget bill saves school funding and prevents passing a budget that leaves our public schools ill-equipped to effectively educate our young people."

"We have a middle school crisis in New York City. CEJ has a comprehensive middle grade action plan, to address this crisis. Far too many of our children especially children of color are leaving middle school unprepared for high school, let alone college. It took 14 years to get the funding and we will not let it be taken from us now! The Assembly bill keeps the promise on school funding and requires the Mayor of New York City to keep his promise by reversing the funding cuts he has proposed; CEJ parents demand that this bill be passed," said Zakiyah Ansari, Brooklyn parent from the NYC Coalition for Education Justice.

Doug Williams, a parent from Schenectady, said, "These funds make an immediate difference in our children's lives. Thanks to last year's funding increase the Schenectady City School District reduced class sizes, started an new all-day pre-k program, brought Extended Day programs into 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and the high school, and increased the number of remedial math and reading staff. We need to expand these programs next year, but we can't do it unless the state keeps the promise."

"Parents in communities across upstate and in needy suburban districts have stood united with parents from New York City for 15 years. Last year we won an historic victory that promised to provide the resources to educate our children," said Karen Scharff, Executive Director Citizen Action of New York. "The Assembly is on course to keep the promise, the Senate actually is looking to take funding that should be going into upstate classrooms and put it on an express train to wealthy suburban districts."

"Unequal funding continues to produce unequal and unacceptable outcomes for African American students. Our students continue to be shortchanged. The statewide education funding promised under last years' legislative settlement of CFE must be kept. Otherwise our schools throughout New York State will be left without sufficient materials, too many uncertified teachers, overcrowded classes and inadequate classrooms. This must change and the promised funding be restored to the education budget—that is why we are supporting the Assembly budget bill," said Hazel N. Dukes, President, NAACP NYS Conference.

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