

**ALLIANCE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION
CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY
NEW YORK CITY COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE
NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION**

For Immediate Release
June 29, 2008

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**EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS APPLAUD CITY COUNCIL BUDGET FOR
RESTORING \$129 MILLION IN EDUCATION FUNDING**

***NEW INITIATIVES INVEST IN MIDDLE SCHOOL REFORM AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNERS TO ADDRESS HIGH PRIORITY EDUCATIONAL NEEDS***

This evening the City Council will adopt a budget that includes \$129 million in classroom restorations and creates new grant initiatives that will result in new investment in critical interventions in comprehensive middle school reform and programs for English language learners. The two grant initiatives, negotiated by the Council, are designed to address two of the most urgent educational needs in New York City's schools. English Language Learners, whose four-year graduation rate is half that of the overall student population, are facing a dropout crisis. Research by the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice demonstrates that middle grade success or failure is highly predictive of whether students succeed or fail in high school. In addition, the Council secured a commitment from the Department of Education to implement recommendations by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity to reduce class sizes in low performing schools with existing excess capacity. Schools Chancellor Joel Klein asserted in a letter to Speaker Quinn that the \$129 million be "used to eliminate school budget cuts for all schools for the Fiscal 2009 school year."

"Thanks to the work of Speaker Quinn, Education Chair Jackson and the Council members, \$129 million will be restored to schools with new investments in innovative initiatives for middle schools, English language learners and class size reduction in low performing schools. As a result, New York City will continue to put the education of our children first even in the face of tough economic choices. Together with proper use of state support, this budget will keep New York City schools on the road to adequately funding the sound basic education for each public school child required by the constitution and the courts, rather than shamefully turning back the clock on 15 years of CFE litigation and legislation," said Geri Palast, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity. "We have Chancellor Klein's assurance about eliminating budget cuts, but only time will tell whether or not school budget cuts are fully eliminated by these restorations."

The Middle School and ELL Initiatives negotiated by the Council set aside \$19 million in grant funds, including \$15 million provided through funds reprogrammed from the DOE central budget, and brings us back a step closer towards delivering on that promise. Schools will be able to provide two to one matching funds from their own budgets to the ELL grants and one to one matching funds to the middle grade grants, thus resulting in at least \$45 million in new funds invested in these initiatives.

(more)

"CEJ is very pleased that this year's budget agreement includes a systemic response to a glaring crisis in the middle grades," said Ocynthia Williams, CEJ parent leader. "By establishing a \$12 million incentive matching fund and specifying how it can be used, eligible low performing schools will be able to greatly improve supports to students and teachers. CEJ has fought long and hard to make this a reality and look forward to working with the DOE, the UFT, and other stakeholders on an implementation committee. This is a positive outcome for middle grade students."

"We thank the City Council for negotiating an important initiative with the Mayor that will help struggling English Language Learner kids to succeed," said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of The New York Immigration Coalition. "We are also encouraged by DOE's promise of greater accountability for ELL services. We will continue to work with the Council and the Mayor to ensure the full needs of most vulnerable children are met and that the city's budget complies with the principles and requirements of the Contract for Excellence."

"In a city budget where the Mayor took the axe to many critically important programs across the board, the fact that the Council supported our demand for long overdue investment in these two essential initiatives provides a beacon of hope for students who have been allowed to fall through the cracks," said Billy Easton, Executive Director, Alliance for Quality Education. "The Council deserves all the credit for digging deep and making budget restorations and for insisting on new investments to address the greatest educational needs. It is sadly disappointing that because the Mayor would not meet the Council halfway on funding restorations we are seeing cuts in a number of vital community services."

The middle grades and ELL grant initiatives set aside \$19 million in grant funds, including \$15 million provided through funds reprogrammed from the DOE central budget. To access these funds schools must apply for grants to committees that include representatives of the Coalition for Educational Justice, the New York Immigration Coalition, the UFT as well as the Department of Education. Schools must provide two to one matching funds from their own budgets to receive the ELL grants and one to one matching funds to receive the middle grade grants, thus resulting in at least \$45 million in new funds invested in these initiatives.

While the education groups praised the school budget restorations and the new educational initiatives, they also expressed disappointed over the Mayor's overall budget cuts when the City has a surplus of \$4.5 billion. The \$129 million in restorations, the ELL and middle school reforms, and the class size initiatives were included in the city budget agreement by the Council in response to the outpouring of outrage across the city over Mayor Bloomberg's proposed \$450 million in cuts to DOE. Under last year's CFE settlement enacted by the governor and the state legislature, the City is obligated to increase city budget contributions to DOE by \$2.2 billion over four years, this year's budget sets the city back in meeting the scheduled increases. As part of the overall budget cuts many other programs that are critically important to New York City's communities took cuts including: meals on wheels, senior centers, summer youth employment, immigrant legal services, adult classes for low-income immigrant families, legal aid, mental health services and funding for classroom materials through the Teacher's Choice program.

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