

TESTIMONY

**Joint Legislative Hearing of the
Assembly Ways and Means Committee**

&

Senate Finance Committee

On

Executive Budget Proposals for Education

SFY 2014-2015



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The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators

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Good Morning, Assembly Member Farrell, Senator DeFrancisco, Assembly Member Nolan and Senator Flanagan. My name is Ernest Logan and I am President of the New York City Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). CSA is the labor union representing 6,200 in-service and 10,000 retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Education Administrators and Supervisors working in New York City public schools as well as seven charter schools. CSA is also the collective bargaining unit for 200 Early Childhood Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Early Childhood Education Centers.

With me today is CSA Executive Vice President Mark Cannizzaro, who, prior to assuming his current position with CSA in the fall of 2012, was Principal of Paulo Intermediate School on Staten Island. We want to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the Governor's Executive Budget for the State Fiscal Year 2014-2015.

While CSA is pleased with the proposals included in the Governor's Executive Budget, we believe that more must be done in order to close the student achievement gap and to attain the Regents' goal of ensuring that all children are college and career ready upon graduation.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

For years, you may have heard us speak about the importance of access to the kind of quality early education that allows all children to be school ready. We've urged the state to conduct an audit of the current system, which includes jurisdiction of several different state agencies. The ultimate goal should be to streamline and consolidate the system to avoid duplication of efforts and place the emphasis on real education. CSA is pleased to see that the Governor's Executive Budget proposal takes a step in the right direction by including an investment to support the expansion of full day Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs statewide. A recent study released by the *National Institute for Early Childhood Education* demonstrated the numerous benefits of high quality pre-kindergarten programs. The study confirms again what I think we all believe: preschool programs increase achievement in language arts, literacy, math and science and reduce grade retention and special education placements¹.

¹ National Institute for Early Childhood Education, *Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study*, March 2013

During the Governor's budget address, he noted that in addition to expanding UPK, a thorough review of standards should be conducted. We believe that additional funding will go a long way to increase access to UPK and we also understand that a review of standards, rules and regulations is essential to ensure that these programs are of the highest quality. CSA eagerly awaits further details about this review and stands ready to offer the assistance of our members including our Early Childhood Directors who operate New York City funded centers.

While we support the Governor's proposed expansion of the UPK program, we also strongly urge the Legislature to act on Mayor DeBlasio's proposal to allow New York City to fund expansion through a tax on the city's wealthiest residents. CSA is concerned that the Governor's budget proposal would not fully support a UPK expansion on an ongoing basis and would potentially cause districts to scramble for funding year-to-year. There is a possibility that seats would have to be defunded at some later point. If we are going to encourage districts to expand full day UPK, we must also assure them that the funding will be available year-to-year to support both immediate and future plans.

Common Core

We were pleased to hear the Governor speak of convening a panel on the Common Core that would recommend corrective measures by the end of this legislative session. As many of you may have read or heard, schools throughout New York City have experienced long delays receiving all the resources necessary to successfully support the roll-out of the Common Core. Materials and textbooks were being delivered well into the fall and early winter, compromising the length and therefore the quality of instruction. It is difficult - and perhaps in some cases impossible - for teachers to become familiar with the material before delivering it to students.

CSA urges the Governor to charge this new panel with looking at the testing issue as well. New York State must consider the adequate amount and type of testing, especially for those subjects for which no state assessment currently exists. Art and music are good examples. (Part of this discussion should include deliberations on what would be the most appropriate testing for special education students.) In addition to causing excessive anxiety for parents and children, excessive testing requirements are adding a new layer of fiscal constraints. We must determine the overall effectiveness and real value of all this testing.

We eagerly await more details about the panel and its charge, but at the same time we urge vigilance about the amount of time taken. The state assessments administered this spring will once again be aligned to Common Core standards.

State Aid

The Governor's Executive Budget includes a 3.8% increase in school aid funding. We join the *Alliance for Quality Education's* call to increase school aid by an additional \$1.9 billion. New York is far from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) commitment (about \$5.3 billion behind); we must increase school aid funding before we are even farther away from fulfilling the promise of CFE.

Over the summer, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) released the results of the state assessments administered in the spring. The results revealed that the student achievement gap in New York State continues. According to an August 2013 NYSED press release:

- 31.1% of grade 3-8 students across the State met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard; 31% met or exceeded the math proficiency standard.
- The ELA proficiency results for race/ethnicity groups across grades 3-8 reveal the persistence of the achievement gap: only 16.1% of African-American students and 17.7% of Hispanic students met or exceeded the proficiency standard.
- 3.2% of English Language Learners (ELLs) in grades 3-8 met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard; 9.8% of ELLs met or exceeded the math proficiency standard.
- 5% of students with disabilities met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard; 7% of students with disabilities met or exceeded the math proficiency standard.

These figures are alarming. Over the years, our school leaders have had to do more with less. Although many of our members manage to work minor miracles every day to leverage resources in order provide their students with access to programs and services that support their academic endeavors, others have no choice but to eliminate these programs and services in order to balance their budgets. Programs such as music and art have often been eliminated,

in spite of the fact that these courses keep many students excited, engaged and willing to return to school day after day.

As we look to expand access to UPK, we need to ensure that these very young children have a quality K-12 system waiting for them. Due to funding constraints, kindergarten seats are often limited and essential programs and services to support academic endeavors are eliminated. What good would the gains earned in UPK do if these children then enter a K-12 system that is inadequate and ill funded? We need to set the bar higher. Our students can't afford for us to continue to delay our commitment to CFE. We understand the task before the Legislature, but we urge you to get as close as possible to the \$1.9 billion in additional funding.

If New York is to be successful in ensuring that all students graduate college and are career ready, then we must make this financial commitment to our schools. .

Teacher Excellence Fund

In the final report of the Governor's *New New York Education Reform Commission*, the Commission made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 3. Reward the best and brightest educators, especially in our struggling schools

The Governor's budget does take Recommendation 3 into consideration, and proposes to create a Teacher Excellence Fund to reward those teachers who receive a rating of highly effective on their Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) as set forth in 3012-c of the education law. However, this new fund does not acknowledge or reward the work of Principals who also rate highly effective on their APPR as prescribed in 3012-c. As described in the supporting budget documents, this new fund is supposed to not only reward higher performing educators, it is also supposed to be a retention tool. CSA respectfully requests that the Legislature expand this fund to ensure that Principals who are rated highly effective also have an opportunity to receive up to \$20,000 in supplemental compensation.

School Leader Professional Development

Over the years, school leaders have been dealing with rising education standards and demands while their school budgets remain flat or in many cases decrease. The difficulty of trying to

balance the needs of students with shrinking budgets places a tremendous amount of stress on school leaders, hindering their ability to serve in their role as the instructional leader of a school building. We often hear of administrators who are pulled away from their instructional duties to attend to tasks previously performed by an employee who was laid off due to budget constraints. The role of instructional leader has become even more crucial, as conversations in both the state and country have turned to student achievement and eliminating achievement gaps among our youth.

To ensure that school leaders successfully manage and meet ongoing challenges as well as succeed in their role as instructional leaders, New York State must provide our Principals, Assistant Principals and Supervisors, with access to ongoing professional development. The research-based literature related to effective schools and student achievement has long acknowledged the critical role of Principals in providing leadership that supports a highly complex human organization, one that is a cohesive and collaborative community of learners.

A number of years ago, CSA created the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), a not-for-profit organization designed to deliver practical, relevant and essential professional development for today's school leaders. ELI provides standards-based, results-driven leadership training to help school leaders successfully fulfill their responsibilities as instructional leaders. We need to invest in more of this kind of high-level training and support. ELI's programs give school leaders the tools they need to create true learning communities.

Conclusion

Our students deserve better than most of them are getting. We must provide programs, services and supports to prepare all students not only for college and career, but for life. We will only be successful in educating our students when we take the time to discuss, plan and implement, and provide the necessary funding. During the upcoming budget negotiations, we urge the Legislature to continue to advocate for our students, increase school aid funding as well as funding for much needed school leader professional development.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you to and present this crucial information.