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Dear Friend,

I'm reaching out to you to discuss the recently passed 2015-16 state budget and what it means for New York's schools. **This year's state budget was a hard-fought battle between the Legislature and the governor over his radical education agenda.**

While the governor targeted teachers with drastic policy changes, the Assembly fought back to protect educators and boost funding for our schools. We believe education is a top priority, and every teacher deserves the support and resources they need to help our students succeed.

In an unprecedented move, the governor used the state budget to push his extreme education policy initiatives and held school funding hostage in the process. **In addition, his proposed "reforms" failed to take into account important factors outside of the classroom that affect the success of our students and teachers.** While we can all agree our education system can be improved, attacking dedicated teachers is never the answer.

When it came time to fight back against the governor's unacceptable proposal, the Assembly Majority was left without a partner, as the Senate was unwilling to take a stand for our schools. And, because the Legislature's ability to change an executive's budget proposal is limited by the constitution, it was impossible to remove everything we disagreed with. Further, voting NO on the budget would have put much-needed school aid, as well as funding for child care and other vital programs, in jeopardy.

In the end, the Assembly Majority fought for and won major concessions. We took the evaluation system out of the hands of the governor, and subject to some parameters, put it into the hands of the Board of Regents, who will work with experts to develop teacher evaluations that place less emphasis on state test scores. In addition, the Legislature fought hard to secure funding for the Regents so that they will have the resources to undertake this important task. And, we also secured a significant increase in funding from what the governor proposed, ensuring \$23 billion in education aid – an increase of \$1.6 billion over last year.

This year's budget is certainly far from perfect, but the alternative – the governor's original proposal – would have been much worse for our schools. And the fight isn't over. **We're also working to limit high-stakes testing and ensure that input from local schools and parents is heard.**

I'll continue fighting for an education system that works for both teachers and students.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Benedetto
Member of Assembly