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Statement of the New York State Council of School Superintendents on the 2017-18 State Budget for Schools

ALBANY – The approval of the \$1.1 billion increase in School Aid in the new state budget will enable school district leaders to make better decisions and present better choices to their voters in their May 16 budget votes. Some districts will now be able to avoid program reductions or tax increases that might have been necessary had uncertainty over state support lingered.

The School Aid increase is less than the \$1.5 billion the Educational Conference Board identified as necessary to preserve current school services. But the 4.1 percent increase is roughly double the increase in the overall state budget and we are grateful to state leaders for again making education a priority.

Another positive is that the Foundation Aid formula will be preserved. Phasing-in and updating the Foundation Aid formula is a cornerstone to giving public schools more financial stability in the years ahead.

In the remaining months of this legislative session we will continue to work with state policymakers on other elements of a financial sustainability agenda for schools. These include making common sense adjustments to the tax cap so that it will be more predictable and workable, enacting mandate relief and other reforms to empower schools to produce more impact for students from all the resources taxpayers do provide, and giving schools access to reserve like those available to municipalities, starting with a reserve for teacher pension costs.

It is important to recognize that the new budget will significantly increase costs to some districts for charter school tuition, however. Affected districts will be required to absorb tuition increases of \$500 per charter student in their budgets for 2017-18, with no offsetting help from the state until the following year. For some districts, this will be a large and unanticipated cost – earlier news accounts had suggested there would be *no increase* in district costs for charter schools in 2017-18.

We are concerned that growing commitments by the state to funding charter school costs could undermine its capacity to assure adequate support for district schools. The budget also includes increasing and new financial support for nonpublic schools. Traditional public schools continue to educate roughly 85 percent of the state's schoolchildren. They are the primary vehicle for fulfilling the state constitution's promise of a sound basic education for all children, whatever their circumstances, wherever they come from, whenever they arrive.

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We will also continue to advocate for actions to strengthen the capacity of schools to offer career and technical education. Quality CTE programs are a proven strategy for enabling students to make a successful transition from school to real jobs, while also meeting the workforce needs of expanding employers. A cap within Board of Cooperative Educational Services Aid since 1990 is blocking the development of those opportunities. A corresponding change in Special Services Aid for the “Big 5” cities is also needed.

The adoption of this year’s state budget was not on-time but still timely for budget decision-making in most school districts. We are grateful to the Assemblymembers, Senators and Governor for their persistence in producing this budget now and not deferring action past the deadlines for district budget action.

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The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents and assistant superintendents in New York State. The Council provides more than 800 members with professional development opportunities, publications and personal support while advocating for public education and the superintendency.