



## A MESSAGE TO LAWMAKERS

In relation to the 2013 – 2014 Executive Education Budget

February 26, 2013

An increasingly common concern heard from educators across New York State is that students in years to come will never again have learning opportunities as good as those received by students today – or in some time already passed.

The actions you take in this year's state budget can help schools overcome financial challenges and preserve learning opportunities for children.

- ✓ **Fiscal Stabilization Fund:** We strongly support using the \$203 million Fiscal Stabilization Fund to provide additional general operating aid to school districts.
- ✓ **Management Efficiency and Performance Improvement Grants:** The proposed \$50 million increase in funding for Management Efficiency and Performance Improvement grants should be used instead to provide additional general operating aid to school districts, along with \$33 million in unspent funds for those programs from this year.
- ✓ **Teacher – Principal Evaluations:**
  - *September 1 Deadline* - The Governor proposes a September 1 deadline for evaluation plans. This is impractical because schools will not receive student growth scores from the State Education Department before mid-August. Districts and unions will want to consider this data before revising their plans. Further, unionized staff may not be available over the summer to negotiate and must be paid for this time, adding to the financial challenges of schools. The deadline should again be set for mid-January.
  - *Recurring Aid Penalty* - In addition, the Governor proposes to make aid penalties recurring, so that if a district loses aid for missing a deadline in one year, that aid would be lost in every future year as well. This is excessive. Which is worse for students: to have their district miss a deadline for an evaluation plan, or have it suffer a permanent reduction in state aid. Students should not be penalized eternally because adults cannot reach timely agreement in any one year.
- ✓ **Special Education Waiver and Paperwork Reduction:** We strongly support the Governor's proposals to allow schools to obtain waivers from specified special education mandates and to reduce paperwork demands on schools and local governments.
- ✓ **Stable Pension Rate:** We support pension smoothing, but are awaiting a TRS and Comptroller independent evaluation of the Governor's proposal. However, the stable pension rate proposal is a creative option which attempts to help school districts and local governments with a crushing problem and one of the primary factors driving fears of financial insolvency.
- ✓ **Mandate Relief:** Mandate relief must be an integral aspect of all budget and legislative discussions and while the Executive Budget begins to address mandate relief, but much more relief is needed to divest schools and municipalities from unfunded and burdensome mandates.