

GEA Letter

Dear Elected Representative,

As one of more than 300,000 New York State PTA members, I am writing to express my views on the messages contained in the proposed 2014-15 Executive Budget. With education reform and equity receiving unprecedented media, legislative and public attention, Governor Andrew Cuomo proposed a 2014-15 State budget that included a proposed \$807 million (3.8%) increase in State support for pre-K-12 education. The Governor's proposed \$807 million increase breaks down to three key areas (\$603 million increase). For 2014-15, the Governor proposes to freeze foundation aid payment at the 2013-14 level and restore \$323 million of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) "takeaway".

We believe that accountability is a shared responsibility that must begin with a predictable, level playing field and bring State policymakers together with educators, communities and parents in a common effort to chart a successful future for our children. We ask that you consider the following thoughts and responses to the governor's proposal.

School Funding to Support Needs, Build Ideals: Over the past four years, schools across New York State have eliminated more than 30,000 positions and depleted reserves in an attempt to respond to challenges of the recession and legislatively imposed funding limitations. As we prepare for the school year, we offer three priorities: First, do no (additional) harm; Acknowledge and respond to the magnitude and cost of education reform efforts; Invest in highest priority reform efforts.

We support a minimum state aid increase of \$1.5 billion that will be required to avoid additional 2014-15 program and staffing reductions. We object to and reject the Governor's proposal for \$2 billion in tax cuts and property tax freezes. *If New York State truly has a \$2 billion surplus, its first priority should be to honor commitments it has already made to schools beginning with GEA elimination over a period of not more than two years.* Invest in strategies proposed by the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Family Engagement Coalition to better prepare educators, parents and communities for successful implementation of Common Core based instruction. Consider and address current K-12 issues before taking on new challenges. We welcome a number of new initiatives proposed by the Governor but to be considered as realistic, early childhood education and technology investments must be accompanied by realistic current year budget appropriations not come at the expense of current program.

In the end, if we are to elevate achievement, while protecting the creative and innovative core of our American culture, we must focus on educating the whole child while recognizing that successful education requires a true partnership between schools, families, and primary caregivers. The most significant progress will be possible only when all parties are challenged, engaged, optimistic and guided by the same vision.

Sincerely,