

February 2004

Education

From the NYS Assembly • Sheldon Silver, Speaker
Steven Sanders, Chair, Education Committee

Governor's budget flunks education, fails kids

Details lacking on plan to comply with CFE decision, budget shortchanges schools \$304 million

This year, one of the biggest issues facing the state is the Campaign for Fiscal Equity ruling, which requires the state to implement reforms to ensure that the necessary resources are available to provide the opportunity for a sound, basic education. While it's encouraging that the governor's budget does not eliminate the Assembly's pre-kindergarten and class size reduction initiatives, as he did last year and in previous years, his budget does not address the CFE decision, and he continues to delay the implementation of a new formula.

The governor spent \$11 million fighting to prove in court that an eighth grade education is adequate for our children in this day and age. This kind of wrong-headed thinking will only leave our communities open to the kinds of problems that result from low education standards.

We have a moral obligation to educate our children, but the governor's foot-dragging is holding us back. By refusing to provide a concrete proposal to address the CFE decision until March, the governor's budget offers only speculation about meeting new funding requirements. Meanwhile, schools are left with no idea how the

What the experts are saying...

"[The governor's proposal] doesn't even come close to covering new expense increases."

- *Henry Marini, Chief Financial Officer, Rochester City School District*

"The response to the CFE lawsuit should not be built on a foundation that is unpredictable and objectionable. Instead, the state has an opportunity to do something truly impressive and far-reaching. That is, to help reduce class size in New York City schools – which in our elementary schools is now 30 percent greater than in the rest of the state."

- *Michael Bloomberg, Mayor, New York City*

"AQE supports . . . multi year funding adequate to provide every child with a meaningful high school education as defined by the Court. The Governor's proposals today don't go far enough to meet those needs. We need a promise from the Governor that the funds generated this year and in succeeding years will ensure compliance with the court order."

- *Regina Eaton, Executive Director,*

state will meet this year's needs.

Not only does our Constitution mandate it, but common sense tells us that in order to ensure a prosperous future for New York we must provide every one of our children with a sound, basic education. Yet year after year the governor tries to undermine the state's education system with drastic budget cuts on system, guaranteeing all students a strong start on academic achievement and success.

Alliance for Quality Education

"Simply, it's not enough. We continue to not fund education the way we should in New York State."

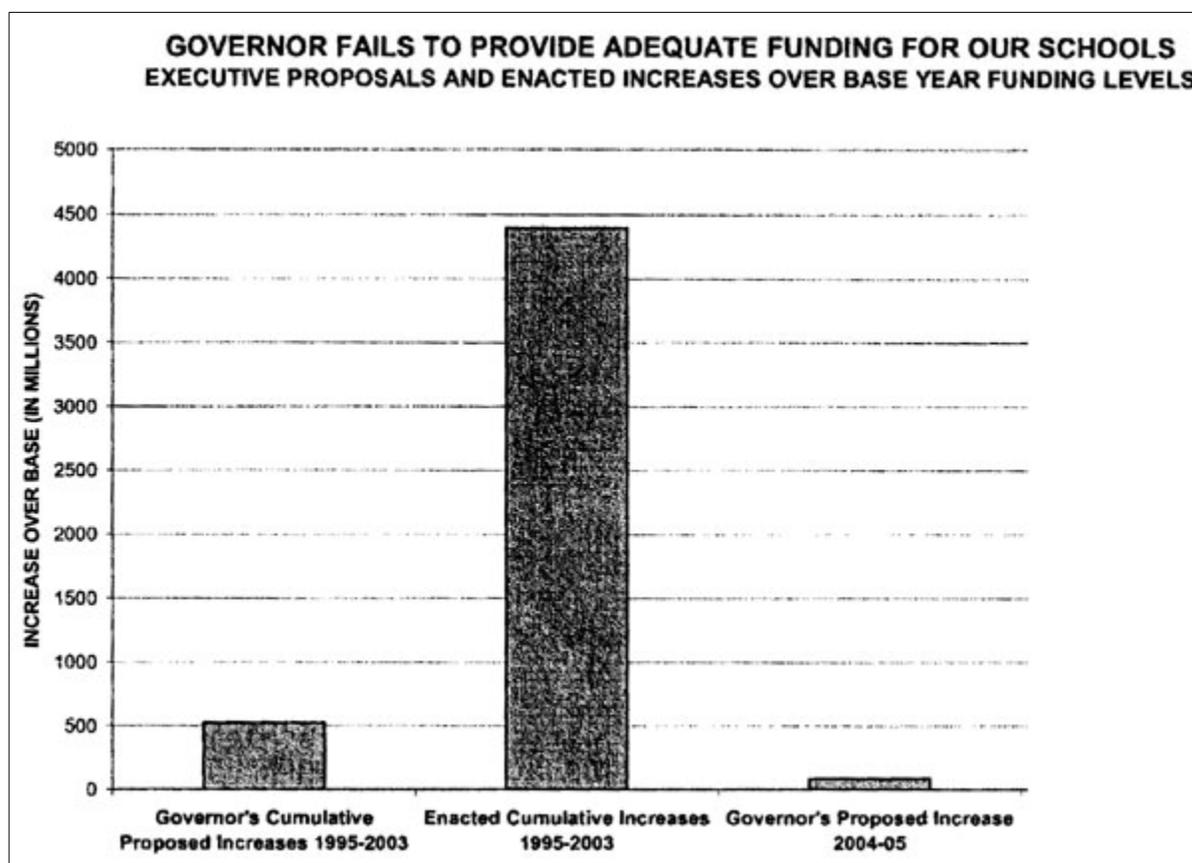
- *Calvin Corriders, President, Syracuse School Board*

"...This...is only a wobbly baby step when a giant leap is needed."

- *Michael Rebell, Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity*

"If the aid picture remains the same, given that the budgets will go up, that will be picked up by the taxpayers again."

- *Phil Sions, Asst. Superintendent for Business, Nanuet Schools*



The Governor's Permanent Record: Wrong Choices for Students

Last year, the governor tried to cut school aid by \$1.4 billion before the Legislature stopped him, passing a bipartisan budget over his vetoes to restore \$1.1 billion of his cuts. These restorations helped protect the quality of schools, while averting the largest property tax hike in state history.

This year, the governor's budget contains at least \$304 million in cuts to school funding – including \$240 million for certain expense-based aids such as BOCES, transportation and special education. On top of that, he ignores inflation, rising enrollments, and the need to help students meet higher standards. The New York State School Boards Association and the Educational Conference Board estimate that state aid would need to increase by \$650 million merely to sustain existing programs. The governor's school aid cuts again threaten to force school boards to choose between cutting programs or raising property taxes to make ends meet.

Specifically, the governor cuts:

- \$35 million in funding for BOCES
- \$89 million in funding for disabled children
- \$84 million in transportation aid – money that was promised to reimburse schools for projects they've already paid for

- \$20 million from Teacher Centers, which help keep our teachers well-trained and up-to-date
- \$45 million in Teacher Support Aid
- His budget also places a moratorium on new school construction & proposes rationing building aid once his moratorium expires

Assembly still fighting for the best schools

In his rhetoric the governor boasts of increasing school aid by \$4.7 billion during his tenure. Yet each year, it's the Assembly that must fight to provide schools with the resources they need to meet the high academic standards that will attract the jobs of tomorrow's economy. In fact, our schools would have \$3.8 billion less if the Assembly had gone along with the governor's previous budget proposals.

We must invest in education to unlock our children's full potential – it's that simple. There's no question that our state is facing difficult financial times and sacrifices have to be made, but we can't gamble with our children's future. And we cannot allow the governor to balance a flawed budget at the expense of our schools, students and homeowners.

We must help schools renovate and repair unsafe buildings and relieve overcrowded classrooms.

We must also increase accountability to make sure resources are used effectively.

Money won't solve all our schools' problems, but with adequate resources we can begin addressing the barriers to a good education.

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