

## SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: THE TRUTH ABOUT SCHOOL FUNDING IN NEW YORK STATE

**Myth #1: Schools and school districts have enough funding to provide all of their students with a quality education in spite of state funding cuts.**

REALITY: The fact is that no one in state government—not the governor, the legislature, nor the state education department—has examined what impact the state cuts to education have actually had on children and schools. But independent research shows that state cuts to education have detrimentally affected children throughout the state and have disproportionately hurt districts in low-wealth areas that serve large numbers of children from low-income households. Because of inadequate funding, many schools throughout are unable to provide basic state-required educational resources like books, required course offerings, and technology to all of their students. This means that the requirement in the state constitution that all students be provided the opportunity for a sound basic education is being widely flouted.

**Myth #2: Students won't benefit from additional funding.**

REALITY: With adequate funding, schools will be able to provide students with the full range of resources that are constitutionally required but are not currently offered in many schools because of limited budgets. Benefits to students will include: additional textbooks so students no longer have to share in class and can take books home after school; smaller class sizes; repaired and upgraded computers for student use; required tutoring and other supports for students who are struggling academically; restoring advanced science and math classes; honors and AP classes; art and music programs; physical education classes; foreign language classes; career and technical education; school librarians; field trips; internships; school government; school newspaper; and sufficient guidance and college counselors.

**Myth #3: Schools and school districts could provide all of their students a quality education with their current funding—they just need figure out how to “do more with less.”**

REALITY: Neither the state government nor the state education department has produced any evidence to support this claim. Moreover, they have not provided schools and school districts with any guidance or models to show them how they can meet constitutional requirements and new state mandates with less money.

**Myth #4: New York State is fully meeting its school-funding obligations under state law.**

REALITY: Foundation aid for schools statewide is currently almost \$4 billion below the level the state legislature itself determined in 2007 was necessary to provide all students with the opportunity for a sound basic education. In 2009, the state froze the level of state aid and deferred full payment of the constitutionally required amounts. Starting in 2010, each year it has reduced the amount of foundation funding by imposing a “gap elimination adjustment” that it has

claimed is necessary to help eliminate the “gap” between available state revenues and state expenses. Currently this “gap elimination adjustment” is over \$1.6 billion.

**Myth #5: The state doesn’t have enough money to increase education funding.**

REALITY: This year, the governor has announced that the state has a budget surplus, and the governor has announced that he intends to use the surplus to cut property taxes and various business and estate taxes by about \$2 billion instead of providing the school aid that students have been promised and that the constitution requires.

**Myth #6: Governor Cuomo’s 2014-15 executive budget proposals provide a big funding boost to schools.**

REALITY: The governor’s \$608 million proposal for basic school operations would provide only a 2.91% increase in school aid this year. Just to meet mandatory cost increases and avoid more cuts in staffing and programs, school districts will need at least a 3.7% increase, according to the Education Conference Board. Under the governor’s scheme, New York City would receive a 2.76% increase, Syracuse would receive a 1.74% increase, and Buffalo would see only a 1.72% increase.

**Myth #7: Gov. Cuomo helped New York fix its school-funding problems by establishing an education reform commission charged with “evaluating education funding, distribution of State aid, and operating costs” and examining “the unique set of issues faced by high-need urban and rural school districts.”**

REALITY: In its final report that was issued in January 2014, the governor’s New NY Education Reform Commission was silent on these issues, saying that it was unable to make any recommendations regarding the critical funding issues because of “their complexity, the wide variety of views surrounding them, and the limitations of time and resources.”

**Myth #8: New York spends more on education than any other state and gets poor results.**

REALITY: According to the January 2014 issue of *Education Week’s* “Quality Counts,” New York is fifth highest in per capita spending, adjusted for regional cost differences, and its overall achievement levels are higher than 29 other states and the District of Columbia. More importantly, New York’s high average spending masks the fact that the state contains some of the highest spending and highest achieving school districts in the country, but the distribution of education spending is more inequitable than in most other states, *and vast numbers of students throughout the state are not being provided a meaningful educational opportunity.*

**Myth #9: The governor and the legislature can shift the blame to schools or school districts.**

REALITY: As a matter of constitutional law, it is the *state*, and not local schools or school districts, that is ultimately responsible for ensuring that students receive appropriate educational services; if student achievement is not at desired levels, legally the fault lies with flawed state policies and inadequate state actions.