



TESTIMONY

OF THE

NEW YORK STATE

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONSORTIUM

(NYSSAC)

TO THE

NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF BUDGET

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Good morning Budget Director Paul Francis, Deputy Secretary of Education Dr. Manuel Rivera and senior members of the Division of the Budget and the governor's office. My name is Kevin Banes, and I am the director of government relations for the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS). I am joined by Brian Gibbons, director of public affairs for the New York State Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA).

Jointly, we represent the New York State School Administrators Consortium (NYSSAC), a government relations collaborative between our two organizations. Our collective goal is to advocate for and support New York State's public school leaders – Principals, Assistant Principals and other administrators – so they have the tools and means to improve student achievement. Our collective voice embodies the viewpoint of educators who lead the most successful schools in the state and the country.

Equally important, we are the voice of leaders in schools facing serious challenges. These schools make great strides every day to meet the state's high standards, and we assure you that the leaders in these schools remain steadfast in their determination to achieve successful outcomes for their students. Our members are working hard every day to raise student test scores, advance higher standards of excellence, and increase high school graduation rates.

NYSSAC presents a unified voice for over 20,000 active and retired administrators across New York. Our members lead schools in rural, suburban and urban settings, including all of the Big 5 school districts.

We thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts on public education as they relate to the upcoming budget. Our testimony will broadly outline some of the issues we feel Albany should be looking closely at in the months to come.

SCHOOL AID

First, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the tremendous advances resulting from the enacted 2007-2008 State Budget. Thanks to innovative leadership and creative thinking, New York State is leading the way with an historic investment in public education and its "Contracts for Excellence," that provide for effective spending practices and greater accountability for educators. NYSSAC commends the Governor and the Legislature for their work in these two areas. All New Yorkers – particularly those with school-age children now and in years to come - owe you a debt of gratitude for having the vision to make these victories for children possible. As you have heard time and again, the additional resources provided for in this year's budget are desperately needed in many communities where students face challenges that go far beyond those evidenced by standardized testing and assessments.

Looking ahead to 2008, we are concerned about recent forecasts that indicate these long-term investments could be threatened in the upcoming budget cycle. We urge the Governor and legislative leaders to remain steadfast in their commitments to public education and ensure that the historic agreements of last spring are sustained and renewed. Despite the dedication and unwavering commitment of educators, we all understand the many obstacles that continue to confront our schools everyday. Money cannot solve every problem, obviously, but the additional funding is making a positive difference in and around the state.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

"Leadership is vital to the success of school reform. The task of school leadership is to create and sustain conditions that enable all students and teachers to reach the higher learning standard."

New York State Blue Ribbon Panel on School
Leadership

In order to properly train and retain school leaders, it is critical that support systems exist to provide them with ongoing guidance, encouragement and opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge. New York State has become a role model for successful school reform, and the time is right for the state to invest in developing and retaining quality school leaders to lead those reforms. If schools are to succeed in closing the achievement gap, the culture must be one that embraces on-going professional growth. We strongly recommend the state advance and fund school leadership development initiatives, beginning with the creation of a taskforce or commission to identify the needs and challenges facing administrators and then map out specific and coordinated professional development proposals. Such a commission could also explore the creation of a specialized and recognized leadership credential that would allow school leaders to earn additional compensation, as well as professional learning communities. Ultimately, we would like to see state-funded School Leadership Centers, similar to the successful teacher training centers, where school administrators can participate in college certified continuing education, share best practices, discuss significant leadership issues and expand their skills.

The success of a school community is due in large part to the quality of that school's leadership team. School leaders, including principals, assistant principals, directors and other school administrators, are crucially important in efforts to improve academic growth in our public schools because they provide the vision, structure, leadership and support that make quality classroom instruction possible. The roles of school leaders have undergone significant changes in recent years as their jobs have become more complex and demanding, and nowhere in the hierarchy of the school-community is accountability more prevalent than at the building leadership level. School leaders must have extensive knowledge of a wide variety of administrative tasks such as budgets, schedules, personnel issues, discipline and attendance problems, health and safety issues, and resource and program management.

The increasing burdens placed on school leaders have put major strains on the profession. As the New York Times highlighted in 2006, we are losing administrators to frustration and burnout. The article found over 42% of principals and assistant principals in nine Northeastern states plan to retire within the next five years. Specifically in New York State, the issue is equally serious. In a recent study conducted by the University at Albany, an estimated 52% of building leaders will be eligible to retire by the year 2010.¹ Within the next ten years, nearly 70% will be retirement eligible.² Compounding the issue is that fewer qualified teachers are seeking to become school administrators. Leadership recruitment initiatives such as professional support and mentoring programs, school loan forgiveness programs and financial incentives must be considered in order to fill these critical positions.

Recently, in an attempt to further study the approaching challenges in school leadership and make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, NYSSAC conducted a statewide survey in the fall of 2007 and focus groups on the role of building leaders. We will be releasing the results of our findings in early 2008, but we would like to share a few highlights with you.

Amongst the areas of concern addressed in the survey were:

- 1- the availability, quality and effectiveness of professional development for administrators;
- 2- the effectiveness of university preparation programs for administrators;
- 3- how administrators view the importance of mentoring and networking to their success as a building leader.

Our data indicates that over 90% of administrators feel their jobs are becoming increasingly complicated, and not surprising, mentoring, networking and in-service professional development were considered highly valuable.

¹ 2005 Profile of the New York State Principalship; page 30

² 2005 Profile of the New York State Principalship; page 30

Of those who responded to questions on the effectiveness of administrative/supervisory preparation initiatives, 72.2% felt that mentoring was the most or second most helpful support, and 69.5% felt that in-service professional development was the most or second most beneficial. 33% believe that *"Networking with Fellow Colleagues"* is critical to their success.

When we asked *"How can we attract and retain quality school leaders?"*, mentoring, ongoing professional development and more practical, hands-on experiences were three of the top four choices (along with higher salaries). 47% of respondents considered professional development one of their top 5 priorities when asked to rank a list of issues that were important to themselves personally.

These results were supported by previous research sponsored by the Wallace Foundation/Rand Corporation in 2002 which found that 70% of the respondents felt that mentoring was important. That study also recommended the development of *"in-service support strategies for the influx of less experienced administrators."* This Wallace/Rand study stemmed from research conducted in 2000 by the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Leadership. The panel, which at the time had been commissioned by the New York State Board of Regents to look at school leadership issues, made several recommendations to the State Education Department. Among the recommendations was the need to provide quality preparation for school leaders.

Regarding professional development for administrators, the U.S. Department of Education guidelines state that: *"professional development efforts should be deeply infused in the life of the school rather than applied as "quick fixes"."*

Incidentally, it's worth noting that while 87% of respondents told us they became school supervisors because they wanted to make a difference for students, less than 7% took the job because it was *"prestigious."*

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

NYSSAC strongly supports efforts to expand and enhance early childhood education services. We are committed to working with the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that strong and smart policies regarding early childhood education are created on the local and state levels.

Last year, we witnessed an increase in state aid to ensure that more children have a strong base to start from. NYSSAC was pleased that the final budget increased funding for early childhood education. As the Governor and the Legislature have astutely recognized, quality early learning programs with highly qualified administrators and teachers are some of the best investments we can make as a society. The extensive research being done across this country is clear and definitive: Children who participate in quality early childhood programs are building strong foundations for their future success. We know -- both intuitively and academically -- that a child's first few years are a time of rapid growth and development, and the effectiveness of that development has a major impact later in life. From ages 0-5, children are acutely responsive to loving care and attention, and are especially vulnerable when that care is absent. It is more effective and less expensive to nurture children in their early years, than to try and fix problems that develop later.

Furthermore, investments in quality early childhood programs not only benefit children, but it also enable parents to become more economically self-sufficient - providing that slots are available and affordable, and that the location and hours fit a family's needs. Working families need and deserve affordable, safe and high quality child care, but given the fact that so many people lack the economic means and/or work non-traditional hours, the challenges to providing quality care are numerous.

Simply put, early childhood education can produce long term positive effects for students that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. We are hopeful

the state will, once again, commit to including early childhood education and Day Care into the existing P-16 educational framework. NYSSAC also strongly supports the funding of full-day early childhood education for all 4 year olds, regardless of income, giving districts the option to opt-in to the program. Leadership recruitment initiatives such as mentoring programs, school loan forgiveness programs and tax incentives are also good strategies to consider. Undoubtedly, so long as the local districts are providing more than lip service to Pre-K programs, these investment will produce long-term benefits for more children. Additional funding is a great start to ensuring that districts will have the needed resources to deliver innovative programs to children.

CLOSING

Throughout our testimony today, we have tried to emphasize the importance of strengthening our schools and the workforce through investments in school leadership and programmatic areas such as early childhood education. We believe in flexible and common-sense approaches, and we look forward to working with all of you over the next few months to help craft a budget that makes sense. We are grateful for this opportunity to share our professional insight.