



SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Input on Spending Needs and Priorities

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Pre-K Funding and Flexibility

The District needs flexibility to use current funding to provide full-day pre-kindergarten programming for all four year olds and to fund three year olds in integrated pre-k classes. Currently, approximately 1000 of the 1600 students enter kindergarten with a pre-k experience. Of those 1000 students, only 336 have had a full-day pre-k experience. New pre-k regulations allow funding for only four year olds, making it difficult to maintain long-standing integrated programs for preschoolers (both three and four year olds). The goal should be that all preschoolers have a full-day pre-k experience as studies have shown that the increased graduation rate is directly linked to full-day pre-k experiences. This requires more money and more flexibility to use current allocations.

State Aid Formula

The state aid formula needs to be adjusted in a number of ways. The Syracuse City School District is the only district, to our knowledge, that reduced 67 positions for the 2007/2008 school year despite a changed formula. The aid formula needs to be adjusted in the following ways:

- (1) account fully for the poverty index;
- (2) allocate Contract for Excellence aid to 25 percent per year;
- (3) increase the calculated Cost of a Sound Basic Education;
- (4) remove Public Excess Cost Aid from the Foundation Aid;
- (5) use HNSBAR (High Need Schools Building Aid Ratio) qualifications to raise the State Sharing Ratio Cap; (6) remove the 3 percent minimum guarantee to all districts; and,
- (7) remove one of two High Tax Aids. Most of these adjustments can be made in such a way that the total cost of education to the state does not increase. The Statewide Finance Consortium has addressed these issues in their formula.

Absent additional local, state, or federal funds, the District is scheduled to cut 137 positions in the 2008/2009 budget.

Timing of State Aid Payments

Currently, the District borrows, on an annual basis, \$50 million for cash flow purposes which results in approximately \$2 million in borrowing fees. This occurs because the bulk of state aid is received in March, after a majority of the year's expenditures have already been incurred. Adjustments could be made for Syracuse or the Big 5 to receive the state aid at the beginning of the school year.

Maximum Cost Allowance/Construction

The maximum cost allowance needs to be adjusted upward. The city was approved for the first of a four phase \$1 billion school renovation plan. The first phase calls for \$224 million of which only approximately \$150 million is aidable, leaving approximately \$75 million for local share or a severe reduction in project scope. In addition, more funding is needed for incentives beyond normal building aid for the procuring and installing materials and equipment that promotes "Green" buildings.

Construction of Health Care and Mental Health Clinics, Article 28 and Article 31

As the renovations of the first seven schools commence, a health clinic and/or mental health clinic in each of these facilities is necessary to meet the needs of our student population. However, the cost for approximately 2000 square feet is \$400,000, which is not aidable. We are requesting building aid for the mental health and/or health clinics.

Contract for Excellence

We are looking to improve student achievement across the District because approximately 70 percent of our schools have been placed on a state or federal list for poor performance. It makes little sense to try to fund individual schools or programs as opposed to the District wide reform. The Contract for Excellence should be individualized by district need. Discussions with SED should be flexible to allow for district wide initiatives and credit for successful current expenditures.

Teacher Recruitment and Training

The District seeks to be the first to implement an Urban Teacher Calendar. This new calendar would include 20 additional days (five hours/day) in the summer to be used for both professional development and direct student instruction. Our teachers would become the best trained and higher paid urban educators in the region. In addition, we are looking for incentives (i.e. loan forgiveness, home tax relief, stipends) to recruit and retain minority staff and those certified in Math, Science, Technology, ESL, and Foreign Language.

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)

In 1975, Congress enacted the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) to ensure that all individuals receive an equitable and high quality educational program. Since the enactment in 1975, Congress has vowed repeatedly to fulfill its promise of funding 40 percent of the additional cost per student, but its current average is between 17 and 18 percent. IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 but funding did not change significantly. The proposed solutions are as follows:

Make new IDEA funding mandatory while keeping the base discretionary.

Increase the federal contribution from 17 percent to 40 percent.

Accomplish full funding by 2012, meeting the commitment of the 2004 IDEA Reauthorization.

Require states to maintain their level of financial support for special education.

Additional Funding

Additional funding is needed in the following areas:

- The Hillside/CHOICE program which intervenes with at-risk youth beginning in 7th grade through graduation.
- The Fine Arts programs in the areas of drama, art, and music.
- A vocational center where young adults would be trained, both school age and out of school age, for careers in the trades.