

Fighting for our members and those we serve

NYSUT leaders and grassroots activists from across the state ramp up their advocacy this month as lawmakers hammer out legislation and try to reach a budget agreement by the April 1 deadline.

K-12 funding

NYSUT and coalition partners are pressing for a \$1.9 billion increase in funding for New York's public schools. That's the minimum needed to avoid further program cuts and job loss, and to begin to narrow the achievement gap between students in high- and low-needs districts. The governor has proposed less than half of that and legislators must step up for children.



Don't test our youngest students

Lawmakers must ban standardized testing of children in pre-K through second grade. Our youngest students should be blowing bubbles, not filling in bubbles. They must also reduce the burden of testing in grades 3-8 as well. Educators feel handcuffed to test preparation as the number of days devoted to various required exams continues to grow.

The back-door voucher bill

The Educational Investment Tax Credit is nothing more than a back-door voucher scheme to provide tax credits to people who choose to spend their own money to send their children to private and parochial schools. It must be stopped.



SUNY hospitals

These institutions are critical to their communities and deserve adequate funding. SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn must be kept open and public to serve the needs of a distressed community, preserve union jobs and educate the next generation of health care professionals.

Hold the Regents accountable

NYSUT is pushing legislators, who elect members to the Board of Regents, to make sure Regents are listening to parents, educators and students — authentically engaging them in discussion, hearing their concerns and making the course corrections that are needed to best support our students.



Teacher centers

Irrationally, almost every year, the governor's budget proposal reduces or eliminates funding for these most effective, efficient and economical resources. This year, teacher centers are zeroed out. The Legislature must ensure funding is restored. No matter what the Regents' reform agenda looks like after the governor's Common Core panel issues its report, educators will still require resources for professional development.

Tax breaks for the wealthy

Citing a projected \$2 billion budget surplus, the governor's budget proposal includes \$2.2 billion in tax cuts. Fully half of those cuts would be in estate tax changes — which benefit primarily millionaires — and breaks for Wall Street banks and corporations. Now is not the time to give tax breaks to people and institutions that don't need them when schools are cutting jobs and programs.



Student data privacy

The privacy and confidentiality of students and educators must be protected. Districts currently work with vendors who use data to manage and plan everything from transportation and food service to special ed and college entrance programs. Soon, however, vast amounts of student performance data will be stored in a centralized location with a vendor contracted by the State Education Department. NYSUT is challenging the program on many fronts, including costs, legacy of the data and, perhaps most importantly, privacy.

Reform the tax cap

Implemented two years ago, the cap has eviscerated the autonomy of local schools and municipalities. You can't cut state aid and then crush the local ability to raise revenue. At a minimum, lawmakers need to eliminate the undemocratic and unconstitutional 60 percent supermajority required to pierce the cap. Every vote should count as one vote.



Three-year moratorium on high-stakes consequences

The Common Core State Standards must be fully and properly implemented, evaluated and corrected before they are used to place and label students or used for high-stakes consequences for teachers. Period.

Property tax 'freeze'

The proposed property tax "freeze" is a regressive tax expenditure that is chained to the tax cap. It essentially puts the tax cap on steroids, giving districts and municipalities even greater incentives to stay under the cap. Such a "freeze" would have minimal benefit to the vast majority of middle-income taxpayers.



Public Higher Education Quality Initiative

New York needs a public higher education endowment to support sustainable investment in faculty and programs at SUNY, CUNY and community colleges. Years of state cuts have dumped operating costs on the backs of students paying increased tuition — and that's wrong.

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Merit pay

The union has always opposed pay-for-performance plans that would pit colleagues against each other and stifle the collaboration that is critical in school environments. The governor's plans to institute a system to reward teachers who earn a highly effective rating on their evaluation with up to \$20,000 is far too subjective and can be manipulated by administrators. A solution? Use the money to develop career ladder programs that reward exemplary educators for taking on mentoring and leadership roles.

Workplace violence prevention

Public school employees must be covered under New York's existing Workplace Violence Prevention regulations. The act currently covers all public employees except those working in pre-K-12 schools. (See story on page 16-17).



Safe patient handling

Passed in both the Assembly and the Senate previously, but never in the same year, the bill would establish a statewide safe patient handling policy for New York's health care facilities and create a safe patient handling work group.

Special schools

The executive budget proposes changes to funding of preschool special education programs (4410 programs) that would net the state \$71 million through 2019, but these programs need growth, not belt-tightening. The 853 Schools and Special Act schools serving students with special needs also suffer from similarly insufficient funding and complicated rate-setting processes. These programs deserve a cost-of-living adjustment and equitable funding.



State Women's Equality Act

There is no room for compromise on this long-overdue civil rights issue. The union demands passage of the New York State Women's Equality Act, legislation that addresses long-standing societal bias and discrimination against women.

Universal full-day pre-K

The devil is in the details. The governor claims to champion UPK, and proposes spending \$100 million in the first year of a five-year phase-in. Cuomo has differences with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who wants to use a progressive tax as a dedicated revenue source for pre-K rather than rely on non-dedicated annual state budget lines. The governor's plan spurs contradictory questions of whether \$100 million is enough, and whether districts — many of which don't have full-day kindergarten, much less pre-K — are ready and able to use the money to launch programs.



DREAM Act

Increased access to higher education for our bright and committed young residents is crucial to growing the state's future workforce and economy. In New York, the DREAM Act would expand tuition assistance and financial aid programs and scholarships to undocumented immigrant students who have lived here since they were young.

Medicare Part B reimbursement

NYSUT opposes the executive budget proposal to stop reimbursement of the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA) for Medicare Part B premiums and only reimburse the standard premium. Retirees participating in the New York State Health Insurance Plan (NYSHIP) are required by the state to enroll in Medicare Part B. Based on their income, some NYSHIP retirees are required to pay an additional income-related Part B premium called IRMAA, which has been reimbursed for the last seven years.



Farm workers' rights

This is simply the right thing to do. The Farm Workers Fair Labor Practices Act would provide to farm workers: collective bargaining rights, workers' compensation, unemployment benefits and other basic rights that most workers have long held.



TAKE ACTION

You can get involved in several ways to make sure lawmakers hear your voice on concerns important to labor, education, health care and more:

- Become an e-activist. It's easy. Visit NYSUT's Member Action Center at mac.nysut.org. From there you can send emails and letters to lawmakers urging them to support public pre-K-12 and higher education.
- Talk with your local president about how to join the union's Committee of 100.
- Plan to participate in an upcoming event:

March 9-11 — Interfaith leaders from Brooklyn will hold a 48-hour fast to support workers and health care services at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. For more info, visit <http://savejobsat.sunydownstate.org>.

March 12 — The Alliance for Quality Education hosts a "No More Excuses Lobby Day." Visit www.aqeny.org/march-12-no-more-excuses-lobby-day/ for more information.

Mondays in March — The Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State hosts "Moral March." Members of the clergy, community, and labor allies are advocating for a moral budget at vigils in New York City and Albany. For more information, and updates on other events, visit www.labor-religion.org.