

Education

The Commitment to Education

Over the past two years, the State of New York has provided historic increases in school aid to districts across the State. In 2007-08, the State enacted a multi-year Foundation Aid formula in order to provide comprehensive operating funds in an equitable, transparent and stable manner. This Foundation Aid formula, which the Assembly had originally developed and initiated, reflects the conditions of school districts and the students they serve. These increases, coupled with the EXCEL capital program of 2006-07 have demonstrated our commitment to provide a sound basic education for all children throughout the State and thereby address the tenets of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit on a statewide basis.

The Governor's response to the current economic climate is a significant departure from the promise of increased State support for education. The Governor's proposal doubles the length of time for fulfilling the commitment to providing these vital resources. In fact, the Executive Proposal reduces State support for Education by \$2.5 billion below estimates for the 2009-10 School Year (SY).

Governor's Proposal

The Governor's 2009-10 budget provides \$20.7 billion in General Support for Public Schools, which is a \$698 million decrease from School Year 2008-09. This proposal recommends a \$1.1 billion Deficit Reduction Assessment (DRA) for the 2009-10 School Year to address

current economic realities. The proposal maintains current reimbursable formulas, freezes Foundation Aid for two years at the 2008-09 funding level and stretches out the full phase in of this formula until 2014-15. The budget overlays the DRA on top of all formula aids excluding Building Aid and Universal Prekindergarten.

The Executive recommendation for a DRA would be a one time reduction of three to thirteen percent for school districts for the 2009-10 School Year. This reduction would take into account district wealth, student need, and tax burden. Starting in 2011-12, Foundation Aid and Universal Prekindergarten would again continue to grow with the full phase in occurring in SY 2014-15 (see Figure 3).

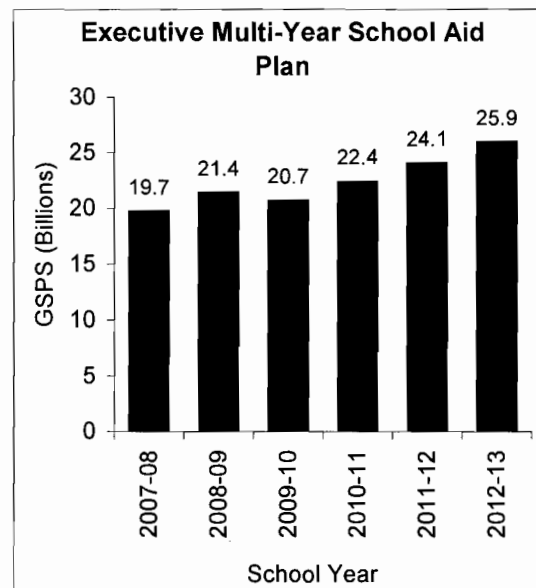


Figure 3

The Governor maintains funding for formula based aids including Transportation, Instructional Materials, BOCES and Private and High Cost Excess Cost aids. However, the proposal also recommends a shift in cost to school districts for the preschool special education program, thereby reducing the support provided by the State by \$154 million and would reduce support provided by the counties by \$30.8 million. In addition, eliminates programs including Teacher Resource and Computer Training Centers and the Teacher Mentor Intern program. In addition, the Executive budget reduces funding for other programs including Aid to Public Libraries, Educational Television and Radio, and support for nonpublic schools.

Universal Prekindergarten: A First Step

The Assembly has been on the forefront of fighting for the continuation and growth of the Universal Prekindergarten program. Over the past three years, both funding and participation have been growing dramatically, from 219 districts and 77,316 students in 2006-07 to 446 districts and an estimated 107,081 students in School Year 2008-09 for an estimated cost of \$404 million. This growth in participation is a clear indication of the recognition of the value of prekindergarten to a child's ongoing educational experience (see Figure 4).

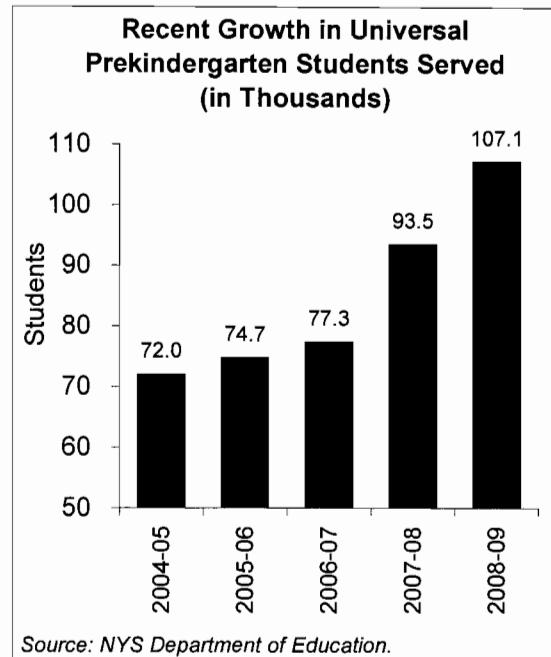


Figure 4

For more than three decades, educational research has consistently documented the clear, lasting benefits that the investment in a high quality prekindergarten program has on student preparation, performance, and college attendance. Prekindergarten provides the first learning step in building a foundation upon which to support future learning. Children attending prekindergarten programs are better prepared to meet the rigorous demands facing them in their schooling and ultimately, in the global economy.

The Governor maintains support for the Universal Prekindergarten Program at the 2008-09 expenditure level, excludes it from his recommended DRA and indicates continued expansion in 2014-15. The Assembly remains committed to the implementation of a truly universal prekindergarten program.

Investment in Quality

For the past several years, the combination of increased State resources, along with the focus on standards, has led to an overall improvement in the educational outcome of students across the State. For example, the percentage of students passing math exams in grades 3-8 has risen from 65.8 percent in 2006 to 80.7 percent in 2008. In addition, the current cohort of students are witnessing increased graduation rates overall, especially for those students attending high school for a fifth year (see Figure 5).

Nevertheless, gaps still remain. In the four largest city school districts, where 68 percent of students are free-lunch eligible, only 58 percent of students graduated with a Regents diploma. In comparison, only 3 percent of students in low-need districts are free-lunch eligible and 92 percent graduated with a Regents diploma.

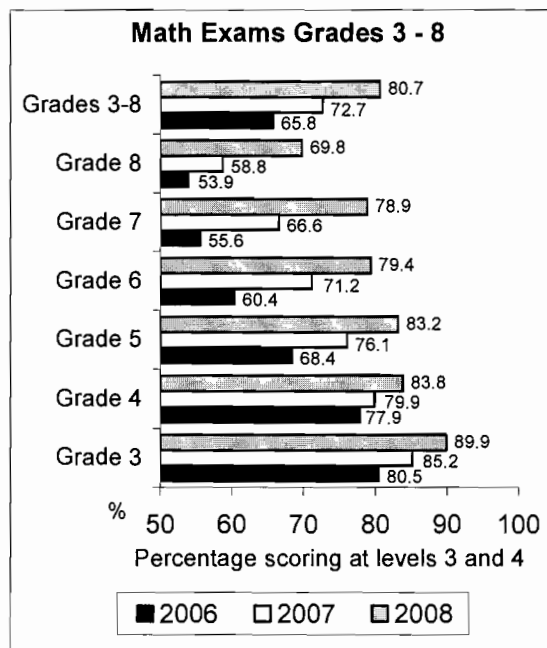


Figure 5

As we proceed with discussions on the SFY 2009-10 budget, the impact of State support on services and programs for all students must be considered, so that the progress that has already been made in providing a quality education for every child in New York will be both preserved and continued.