

**TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
MICHAEL MULGREW, PRESIDENT**

**BEFORE THE
NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE &
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES**

**REGARDING THE
GOVERNOR'S FY 2013-14 EXECUTIVE BUDGET**

JANUARY 29, 2013

Good afternoon Senators Flanagan and DeFrancisco, Assembly Members Nolan and Farrell, and members of these distinguished committees. My name is Michael Mulgrew, and I am the president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

On behalf of our more than 200,000 members, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today about the proposed executive budget. I also want to thank you for your strong leadership and advocacy on behalf of our public schools. Your good work makes a difference in kids' lives each and every day.

Every child deserves a high quality education, and that is why we are encouraged by Governor Cuomo's proposals, which once again prioritize education in ways that will strengthen our schools and communities. We look forward to working with you on these issues this year. Together, we can improve schools for all children.

SCHOOL AID

The governor's proposal of a 4.4% increase in education spending next year is an important step forward for our schools. We urgently need to reinvest in our classrooms and reverse years of cuts that have led to larger class sizes and the loss of many programs and services that students depend on. We also need to begin rebuilding our teaching ranks, which were decimated by the hiring freeze. These losses continue to take a toll on the quality of education that our students are receiving.

That critical need for funding makes Mayor Bloomberg's actions to torpedo a new teacher evaluation system so reprehensible. As you know, it was the UFT here in Albany in 2010 that worked with this Legislature and the State Education Department to get a new evaluation process put into state law, and it was the UFT that was here again last year to work with Governor Cuomo on a fast, fair appeals process for teacher ratings.

Since that time, the UFT has spent months working with the New York City Department of Education to develop a new evaluation system, culminating in six straight days and nights of negotiations in mid-January. But just as we reached a tentative agreement with the DOE, Mayor Bloomberg scuttled it and once again turned his back on our schools. The shattering of the agreement and the subsequent loss of funding was a sad and frustrating end to a lot of hard work. Our schools and our students deserve a lot better.

We had long suspected that the mayor did not like the state law because it would have required the DOE to provide support for teachers and help them improve their skills throughout their careers. That same law also requires an objective and transparent ratings system based on multiple measures. It would have removed the ability to play politics with evaluations, especially manipulating measures of student learning.

We welcome the Legislature's involvement in this important issue, and we urge the governor and the Legislature to help ensure that students and their classrooms are insulated from any cuts that schools are forced to endure as a result of the mayor's actions. If cutbacks become necessary, they should come from administrative and non-instructional sources.

The UFT has not and will not give up on our three-year effort to secure an agreement. We remain committed to negotiating a new teacher development and evaluation system that helps and supports teachers, and we will do everything we can to meet the Feb. 15 deadline put forward by State Education Commissioner John King. To be successful, though, we will need people on the other side of the table who are interested in creating a system that will truly help teachers improve, not in leaving a legacy of blame.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Perhaps the most exciting initiative in the governor's proposals is the \$15 million in funding for the development of community learning schools, a recommendation from the governor's statewide Education Reform Commission. It's an effort that essentially transforms school buildings into community hubs that strengthen entire neighborhoods, and it's an initiative that we strongly support.

Schools that adopt a community schools approach use a comprehensive parent and community engagement strategy to secure outside programs and services for their buildings. Community is defined in the broadest sense possible, including not only non-profits, but private sector businesses, hospitals, universities and communities of faith. Every model is independent and unique, based on the needs of that particular community.

Existing community school models offer a wide range of services, including health, dental and vision clinics, social and mental health services, food programs, mentoring, tutoring and academic intervention. In Cincinnati, where the community schools model is used in every district school, programs and services are built on business plans that work towards financial self-sustainability and are seamlessly integrated into a school's operations. A resource coordinator and a local committee build and maintain parent and community relationships and hold the various service providers accountable.

Most importantly, community learning schools are able to address students' needs in a holistic way by matching students with available resources right there in the building, which in turn improves academic outcomes. Kids can't concentrate or learn if they are hungry or sick. They can't succeed when they're not getting the academic help and support they need. Community schools give teachers and administrators a whole toolbox of options to help their students overcome the challenges in their lives, so that they can focus on their schoolwork.

Building a community school requires a great deal of commitment and hard work, but research shows that it's a model that works. The UFT, together with key strategic partners like the New York City Council, the Partnership for New York City and Trinity Wall Street, is piloting the NYC Community Learning Schools Initiative in six schools this year. We've learned a great deal in the process, and we stand ready to work with more schools that are willing to give this model a try.

EXTENDED LEARNING

The governor's proposals also include offering grants for allowing schools to extend their learning day or add days to their calendar, and thus increase student learning. Extended learning time is a concept that we support and that many schools have explored.

Some larger New York City schools, for example, already have teachers on staggered schedules to accommodate split sessions while still working within the confines of the teacher contract. Others schools have explored accommodations for teachers working with after-school programs that support and enrich the work those teachers are doing in the classroom. To that end, extended time grants could be particularly useful to schools that decide to develop their own community schools models. Just as there is no one-size-fits-all model for community schools, the same is also true for extended time. Schools that adopt an extended time option should be able to design a system that works best for their needs.

LEAD & MASTER TEACHERS

The UFT has long supported a career ladder for teachers as well as initiatives that allow the best teachers to help others improve their skills. Teachers want the opportunity to grow and share what they know will help strengthen their school communities. They also welcome the opportunity to move into leadership roles that allow them to advance the profession.

Governor Cuomo's idea of rewarding excellence by offering stipends to top-performing teachers mirrors the work that we've done to develop the Lead Teacher and Master Teacher programs in New York City. Under each program, teachers split their time inside and outside of the classroom, teaching for part of the day and providing professional development and mentoring the rest of the time. Further investments in these concepts could advance the career ladder that teachers have been seeking. Again, schools should be able to design an approach that best meets their needs.

RESTORING TEACHER CENTER FUNDING

I also want to note the importance of Teacher Centers, which Governor Cuomo unfortunately has not funded in his executive budget proposal.

Teachers are lifelong learners who strive to improve their skills and craft, and what's more, teachers need professional development to earn and maintain various classroom certifications. Strengthening teacher quality is at the heart of improving

student achievement, and Teacher Centers provide educators with the top-notch professional development that they need.

In New York City, a large number of new teachers continue to leave the system within their first few years. Studies have shown that many more new teachers will stay if they receive appropriate mentoring and support – services that Teacher Centers can provide if properly funded.

Thanks to the leadership in the Assembly, we were able to continue this important work last year, albeit at a drastically reduced level. But we are facing the possible loss of these important resources if funding is not restored. We urge both houses of the Legislature to recognize the importance of Teacher Centers and commit funding again this year.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The UFT also applauds the governor's commitment to providing \$25 million for full-day pre-kindergarten in low-income districts. We urge the governor and the Legislature to consider additional funding in this area. Early childhood education is a critical cornerstone for a child's development, and we must do all we can to increase parent access to quality programs and also strengthen the skills of those who are providing care.

The early childhood profession has undergone a renaissance in recent years, and the UFT has been at the forefront of that movement by setting rigorous standards and providing professional development programs for the home-based family child care providers in New York City that we represent.

The days of simply watching children while their parents are at work are long gone. Today, the UFT's over 20,000 family child-care providers are giving young children a strong academic foundation and life skills, using a literacy-based curriculum developed by the UFT Teacher Center that was designed specifically to meet providers' needs. Our kindergarten teachers see the results of that early enrichment when those children arrive in their classrooms prepared and ready for school-age work. What's more, thousands have strengthened their skills by participating in professional development courses offered by UFT Teacher Centers, on everything from literacy, developmental screenings and assessments to CPR and basic first aid.

Research shows the importance of investing in early childhood education. These kinds of programs are critical for the future of our state. By further investing in the child care workforce and expanding access to subsidized care – only 27% of income-eligible families are currently receiving subsidized care – we can make huge strides in closing the achievement gap.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

From community schools to early childhood initiatives, the governor's educational priorities – and his commission's priorities – foreshadowed the call to action we

heard in last week's presidential inaugural address. President Obama spoke of how our "fidelity to our founding principles [the pursuit of equality, freedom, and happiness] requires new responses" and how "preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action." Community schools are collective action. The initiatives focused on early childhood education, and these other initiatives, are indeed new responses to the savage inequalities that have made fidelity to our founding principles more dream than reality.

It is time for us to take on these inequalities, and we believe that every student deserves a quality education. Governor Cuomo has outlined a strong package of proposals that will help move our schools and our profession forward. The United Federation of Teachers remains committed to working with all of you once again this year to help strengthen our schools and our communities.

###