

**TESTIMONY TO
JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
FEBRUARY 14, 2017**

Submitted by: Steven Sanders, Executive Director
ACTS (Agencies for Children's Therapy Services)

Thank You for this opportunity to testify before this joint Legislative Budget Committee on Education.

My name is Steven Sanders. I am Executive Director of ACTS, Agencies for Children's Therapy Services. ACTS is a statewide association of pre-school special education and Early Intervention agency providers. Our members operate programs from the North Country in Plattsburgh down through New York City and Long Island. ACTS members provide both SEIT services as well as pre-school classroom services depending on the needs of our young students with special needs.

Pre-school special education is essential to the remediation of disabilities in these youngsters. It is well established that in the context of the development of the brain, the time frame for altering the trajectory of certain disabilities is finite. The sooner these children receive age appropriate services, the more likely that their particular developmental or learning disability can be successfully addressed.

To the extent that the manifestation of these difficulties can be ameliorated or lessened is obviously great for the youngster and her family... but also great for the state. That is so because when special needs go unattended to for a long time the cost to the State and school districts increases exponentially.

The partnership between the State Education Department and providers has been a constructive one in recent years. This is an area of government where the collaboration has been fundamentally a positive one for both sides. SED learns from providers about successful treatment based outcomes and providers have collegial access to SED decision making

In that spirit there is one important aspect of the Executive's budget recommendation that needs a small legislative tweak and at no expense. The Governor recommends that SED develop a new rate and rate methodology for pre-school integrated special class programs. He further recommends that such new rate of reimbursement become effective on July 1, 2018. Fair enough. But in order to arrive at a sound new reimbursement rate, all the equities must be considered. That is why it is essential that this process include input from the provider community.

This was done successfully several years ago when SED was tasked with developing a new rate for Special Education Itinerant Teaching (SEIT). At the instruction of the Legislature SED convened a panel of stakeholders to be consulted in the development of new rates which are being phased in now. It was a very good process that yielded mostly good results. If the Legislature accepts the Governor's proposal to establish this new rate methodology it should make sure that providers are at the table to ensure maximum input and a fair outcome.

Thank you for your attention to the needs of the programs and providers who serve some of our most at risk youngsters and help them too realize their fullest potential.