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Testimony of Sydney Altfield, Executive Director, Teach NYS

Before the 2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education

Good afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer, Benedetto and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Fiscal and Education Committees – thank you for holding this important hearing, and for spending today listening to the comprehensive needs of both the public and nonpublic school communities.

We know and appreciate the hardships faced by teachers, staff, and parents in all schools, especially the past few years. Both the public and nonpublic school communities have been working diligently to keep our children and teachers safe, while at the same time fulfilling our incumbent duty to provide our children with a quality education.

Today, we are here to address funding for nonpublic schools. We are grateful for the Governor’s inclusion of \$70 million for the STEM reimbursement program in her proposed budget. Because of the reimbursement program, our nonpublic schools have been able to hire certified STEM education teachers who teach our children the skills and means necessary to thrive in our technologically driven society.

We are encouraged by the recognition that hiring good, qualified teachers transforms the classroom experience and ask that the Senate and Assembly support \$5 million in new funding to create an Arts and Music reimbursement program for qualified nonpublic schoolteachers. Studies show that arts integration positively impacts student achievement. Incorporating arts and music into the curriculum not only inspires student creativity but allows for improved focus and concentration, social skills, and decision-making skills – to name a few. \$5 million in funding for Arts and Music reimbursement would allow our nonpublic schools to hire qualified arts and music teachers and incorporate these important subjects into their day.

In addition, our nonpublic school community is in full support of universal free school meals for all students in the state. We believe children throughout New York should have access to free nutritious and healthy meals during their school day. For the past two years, federal funding provided for free school meals and was a critical source for many of our children and families during the pandemic. Without that funding, our families are feeling the impact. Food prices have surged, inflation has accelerated, and households are facing unpaid school meal debt. Our kids should not bear the brunt of this struggle. New York State needs to step in and help fill the gap to ensure no child is left hungry.

There are approximately 370,000 students in the nonpublic school community and 1,700 nonpublic schools statewide. Nonpublic schools account for more than 70,000 direct jobs, including teachers, administrators, and other staff. Additionally, over 15,000 people in New York have jobs that depend on providing private schools or their employees with suppliers or services. Our schools generate \$537 million in state and local revenues through such sources as employment taxes, social security taxes, excise taxes, and sales taxes. Investing in nonpublic schools brings significant return on investment to the state.

Again, we ask that state include \$5 million in the FY 2024 budget to create a new Arts and Music reimbursement program and fully support a universal free school meals program. We want to ensure that our children receive a well-rounded and quality education that develops their skills and prepares them for the future. Our state has made great strides in educational equity over the past decade. Let's not leave the nonpublic school community behind.