



**JOINT NYS BUDGET HEARING
FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2024
EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL**

**Testimony of
Phylisa Wisdom
Director of Government Affairs
YAFFED**

**Presented
On
February 8, 2023**

Honorable Chairs and members of the Joint Budget Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the Fiscal year 2024 New York State Executive Budget Proposal. My name is Phylisa Wisdom and I am the Director of Development and Government Affairs for YAFFED. YAFFED was formed twelve years ago because tens of thousands of New York state school children attend private schools that fail to follow New York State education law section 3204, which mandates that every school teach a substantially equivalent education as to what is taught in the local public schools. These schools, mostly Haredi and Hasidic yeshivas, operate in flagrant violation of the law and openly refuse to teach math, science, social studies, and even English. For the past twelve years we have been working to convince government entities in the state to enforce the law. Yet, each year, these schools continue to operate in violation of the law without oversight, and thereby receive taxpayer dollars in the form of "mandated services" aid and other forms of state and local district aid that is designated for non-public schools. This year's Executive Budget Proposal includes over \$200 million in aid to nonpublic schools.

We urge you to put in place a new safeguard that requires nonpublic schools to attest that they are teaching the required subjects in their schools prior to receiving state aid. While most of New York State's nonpublic schools provide their services with quality and distinction, this is not the case in the Ultra-Orthodox yeshiva system, as has been widely reported. Those schools who refuse to comply with section 3204 of the Education Law should not continue to receive taxpayer funds. While we wait for the state education department to fully implement its new regulatory framework, it is possible to pause payments to these institutions until they have remediated in good faith. This can be accomplished simply by a directive from the Division of Budget that requires all non-public schools to sign a self-certification document that declares their instructional program to be in compliance with state and local law.



I urge you to prohibit schools that do not provide a substantially equivalent education from accessing public funding. Every school that is to receive public funding should be required to sign such a document and make a legally binding declaration that they teach math, science, social studies, and the English language before they are able to access public funding streams.

A simple provision in the form of a self-certification that must be attested to before funds can be accessed makes sense as the regulatory framework plays out over the coming years, and would be the only check for substantial equivalency for students attending these schools. Requiring compliance with the law before providing public money for education is a win-win for the State, for the taxpayers, and most importantly, for the students.

Please find below draft language for this purpose. Thank you for your time.

Under the penalty of perjury, I hereby certify that the above named school provides instruction in ENGLISH that is substantially equivalent to or superior to academic programs available in public schools in our district as required by Education Law 3204.

Under the penalty of perjury, I hereby certify that the above named school provides instruction in MATHEMATICS that is substantially equivalent to or superior to academic programs available in public schools in our district as required by Education Law 3204.

Under the penalty of perjury, I hereby certify that the above named school provides instruction in SOCIAL STUDIES that is substantially equivalent to or superior to academic programs available in public schools in our district as required by Education Law 3204.

Under the penalty of perjury, I hereby certify that the above named school provides instruction in SCIENCE that is substantially equivalent to or superior to academic programs available in public schools in our district as required by Education Law 3204.

I further certify under the penalty of perjury that the above named school provides all other instruction mandated by the Education Law in a manner substantially equivalent to or better than that provided by public schools in our district.