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# THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

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## *TESTIMONY*

Presented to

Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature

Hearing On  
The FY 2015-2016 Executive Budget

February 3, 2015

Albany, New York

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Cleary School for the Deaf (Nesconset)	Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf (Mill Neck)	Rochester School for the Deaf (Rochester)
Henry Viscardi School (Albertson)	New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)	St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)	New York School for the Deaf (White Plains)	St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)
Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)		St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Buffalo)

Chairman Farrell, Chairman DeFrancisco, Senator Flanagan, Assemblymember Nolan and distinguished members of the Legislature, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today.

I am Dr. Bernadette Kappen, Executive Director of the New York Institute for Special Education in the Bronx. I am also the Chair of the *4201 Schools Association*, schools serving Deaf, Blind and Severely Physically Disabled children throughout New York State.

With me today is Timothy Kelly, Vice Chair of the Association and Superintendent of St. Mary's School for the Deaf in Buffalo. In addition to our two schools, the nine other 4201 Schools are located on Long Island, Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, Westchester and Rochester.

We come before you today first to thank the Legislature and the Governor for your longstanding support of our students. Specifically we appreciate the language included in last year's budget to allow for additional support for technology for 4201 schools with the passage of the Smart School's Bond Act. We look forward to working with the New York State Education Department on meeting the requirement for the investment in technology you have provided.

As you know, starting in 2011-12, the process for funding our schools was radically changed. This change initially caused a number of both fiscal and administrative challenges. With your help we have been able to work through several of our concerns.

**4201 SCHOOLS FLAT FUNDED FOR SIX YEARS** - The process for funding 4201 schools is not perfect, does not reflect the diversity among our schools nor does it respond to the changing needs of our students. In addition, the impact of the funding process is compounded by the fact that our sector of education - the 4201 schools - has not been afforded an increase in six (6) years.

In 2009-10 and again in 2010-11, the 4201 schools, like many other education providers, saw a reduction in state support as a result of Deficit Reduction Plans. Since, our funding has been held to 0% growth.

As we are uniquely supported through separate state appropriations, our schools have not received the benefit of recent investments in school aid or special education rates.

The 4201 Schools serve children with "low-incidence" disabilities, including:

- Blindness
- Low Vision
- Deafness
- Hard-Of-Hearing
- Deaf-Blindness
- Significant Developmental Delay
- Complex Health Issues
- Serious Physical Impairment
- Multiple Disability
- Autism

Since 2008, our 11 member-schools have maintained achievement-oriented programs for 1500 students while reducing payroll nearly 11 percent - or approximately \$9,000,000. State funding for our students has been reduced by \$5,400,000 (or 4percent) since 2008-2009.

**PARITY WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL INVESTMENTS** - The 4201 Schools need your help this year; we appreciate your consideration of the following budget recommendations:

The 4201 Schools Association recommends an increase of 4.8% to all programs - deaf infant, residential, 10 month education, and summer school. A 4.8% increase on total funds would result in a school year investment of approximately \$6.35 million.

In addition, we recommend that the total increase be distributed among the 11 state-supported schools for the deaf, blind and physically disabled based on the number of students served at each school and applied to each school's Certificate of Approval (COA).<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we recommend that the investment be appropriated directly to the 4201 schools - similar to the state's support of deaf infant, residential, summer school and in a manner similar to previous budgets. In addition, a direct appropriation will prevent an increase to the per pupil charge (PPC) thereby eliminating any fiscal impact to local school districts.

In addition to operational support for the educational programs at the 4201 schools, we would like your consideration of investing a portion of the settlement funds to improve the health and safety of our facilities and grounds. We recommend a total investment of \$11 million to support delayed capital needs.

- Average Daily Attendance Rate: 85- 95%
- Common Core-Aligned Curricula.
- 108 High School graduates in 2014.
- Student Success - Regents Diplomas, Local Diplomas, Skills & Achievement Credential or Commencement Credential for Children with Severe Disabilities.

In closing, we want to thank the Senate and the Assembly for your remarkable support of our schools. We appreciate your consideration of our 2015-16 budget request as we continue to analyze our unique funding system towards identifying recommendations for a long-term funding methodology.



You have helped us reinforce the message that for children with low-incidence disabilities (deafness, blindness or severe physical disability) -- special education services, and their core communication components are a fundamental educational right - not an indulgence.

**DEDICATED TO THE SUCCESS OF OUR STUDENTS** - The 4201 Schools Association remains committed to the responsible use of taxpayer funding while providing the best educational services to our students. The schools for the deaf, blind and severely disabled have been

<sup>1</sup> Distribution should use a three year average of student FTEs as reported to NYSED on the Consolidated Fiscal Report

partners with the State for almost 200 years. This partnership is stronger than ever because of the support you have provided our students.

We invite you all to visit our schools and to learn more about our efforts to enable children with low-incidence disabilities to be successful students and citizens. And we stand ready to “be part of the solution.”

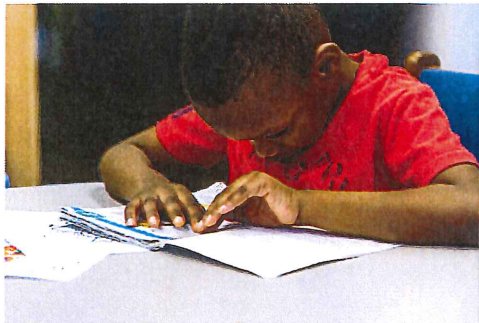
Respectfully submitted

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For more than 200 years, the people of New York have relied on the expertise of the 4201 Schools to provide educational services to children who are deaf, blind and physically disabled. There are eleven “4201” schools located throughout the state, both upstate and downstate.

Each school is governed by its own Board of Directors, receives financial support for operating expenses from the State, and depends on private donations for program enhancements and innovations. The 4201 Schools have established a long tradition of excellence in education and in providing innovative educational services to our students and their families. The 4201 Schools and their locations are as follows:

- Cleary School for the Deaf - Nesconset
- Henry Viscardi School- Albertson
- Lavelle School for the Blind - Bronx
- Lexington School for the Deaf - Queens
- Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf - Mill Neck
- New York Institute for Special Education – Bronx
- New York School for the Deaf - White Plains
- Rochester School for the Deaf - Rochester
- St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf - Brooklyn
- St. Joseph's School for the Deaf - Bronx
- St. Mary's School for the Deaf - Buffalo

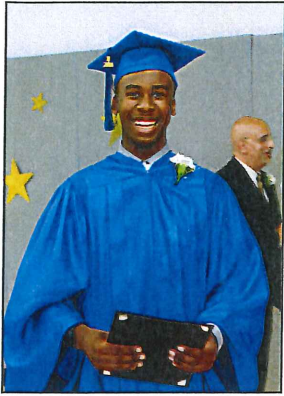
Under Section 4201 of the Education Law, the State has designated and authorized certain private schools to serve the special education needs of deaf or blind or physically disabled students. Students come to 4201 Schools upon application by their parents or school districts, and with the approval of the State Education Commissioner. Several 4201 Schools maintain residential programs, which are also funded through lump sum budget appropriations.

Only students who are profoundly deaf, legally blind, severely physically disabled, or severely emotionally disabled are referred to the 4201 Schools by local school districts, parents, physicians, clinics and other interested parties. An intake evaluation by the 4201 School is completed, and placement is made upon the recommendation of and approval by the student's home school district and the Commissioner of Education. Approval is based on the availability



of an appropriate education program. There are no charges or fees to parents for educational costs, transportation, room or board.

Our students benefit from the academic programs, vocational programs, life skills programs and other specially designed programs at the 4201 Schools. They also take part in the interscholastic sports and other extra-curricular and co-curricular activities at their school. Our schools also work with children with multiple disabilities, for whom the schools are educational/therapeutic environments that foster growth and development in all areas -



academic, sensory, and physically. Some of our students with multiple disabilities may always need certain supports to achieve an interdependent adult life, but for whom academic and personal success is attainable and an important part of our schools' mission.

Those students requiring a 24-hour structured environment as noted in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or whose homes are too far to commute back and forth to school each day live on campus for five days a week at some of the 4201 Schools. There are comprehensive learning and recreational programs for students residing in school dormitories.

The 4201 Schools provide quality education services to children with low incidence disabilities. Our schools are working constantly to support the academic progress and success of the students we serve.




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**STUDENT SUCCESSES & OUTCOMES** - Each of our schools is dedicated to fulfilling the full potential of each of our students, regardless of their level of ability. Examples of typical work, outcomes and success of several of our recent students follow:

*VL is a student who is legally blind. She entered the Institute in 4th Grade. She spoke very little English and was barely reading. Eight years later she is ready to graduate. VL was actively involved in sports: swimming, cheerleading, wrestling and goalball. Her academic performance has been excellent. Just last week she received a college acceptance to Manhattanville College and an academic scholarship for \$19,000. VL was an intern in Assemblyman Gjonaj's office.*

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*"One of our **SENIOR** students received his ACT score last week - he received a total composite score of 20 and a Reading Composite score of 29 (out of 36). This young man has been diagnosed as significantly learning disabled as well as Deaf, yet achieved scores that are greater than many of his hearing peers. He intends to attend college with a goal of developing gaming software (enhanced by the college credit courses he received at Mill Neck Manor School) as this is his passion and his future vocation.*

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**KM** is currently in 7th grade. She entered the Institute in 4th grade. Her academic skills were poor and she had extremely limited independent living skills. K needed help traveling around the campus, handling her clothing and interacting with her peers. Currently K travels independently using her cane, she has improved in all her academic skills and is socializing appropriately with her peers.

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**”GLORIA WINK**, Class of 2007, is working toward a Ph.D. in toxicology through the Rochester Bridges to a Doctorate Program, a joint venture between University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology.

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“Our son, **JIMMY**, who was born with profound disabilities, both physical and cognitive, started at St. Mary’s School for the Deaf when he was a toddler. Jimmy is now 13 years old and from day one, the staff made it all about his ability, NOT his disability.



Born with cytomegalovirus (CMV), **REBECCA** was left with deafness and a learning disability that later was diagnosed as Pervasive Developmental Disorder, an Autistic trait. The fact that she was born deaf was a very difficult thing for all of us, but I think the numerous medical problems she had, with her bladder, her ears, seizures and sleeping, shifted our concerns elsewhere. St. Mary’s School for the Deaf was a great resource for us at a time when we needed answers and support the most. SMSD became a part of our lives when Rebecca was only seven months old. As parents it was difficult to put our infant on a bus three times a week and send her off to school, but it proved to be the best thing for her. She has had a well-rounded education and curriculum, with all of the extras such as being in music shows, playing sports, field trips, drama plays, and even working in a coffee shop.

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**ICHRAK NAJI** was born and raised in Morocco. Ichrak lost her vision and became physically impaired after contracting meningitis. Her family immigrated to the U.S. and Ichrak was enrolled in the R.E.A.C.H. program at Lavelle School for the Blind at age 17.

Ichrak is a charming young woman that travels throughout the campus, smiling and greeting everyone she meets by name. In her short time as a student here, she has developed fluent English language skills. She also participates in the work experience program at Lavelle School. Her first assignment was working at Lehman College library as a library assistant. Ichrak is currently working one day per week as a paid retail assistant at Marshall’s Department store. With the help of her job coach, Ichrak unpacks and prepares items for the selling floor. Ichrak will graduate in June.

In conjunction with the NYS Commission for the Blind and OPWDD (Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities), she and her family are exploring post-graduate school/work experiences. Ichrak is also enrolled in the Hadley School online program working toward her high school diploma.




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**KAUSHIK PILLAPAKKAM** was the Class of 2014 valedictorian. He earned the highest grade point average and is receiving a Regents diploma. Kaushik grew up here at Lexington. Also he is an avid chess player. Kaushik attends Hunter College in Manhattan.

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Our very own **AARON HAMPTON**, senior at Henry Viscardi School, has just been awarded the prestigious “Yes I Can” award for academic achievement by the Council for Exceptional Children. Aaron is a 17 year old young man, currently in 12th grade at the Henry Viscardi School. He has a diagnosis of Marquio’s Syndrome. . The symptoms associated with his disease are abnormal development of bones, including the spine, bell-shaped chest, hypermobile joints, short stature with a particularly short trunk, abnormal heart development and corneal clouding. He lives with his mother and his twin brother in an apartment with elevator.

Aaron is also a participant in a research project that led to a FDA approved enzyme replacement therapy for people with Mucopolysaccharide diseases at Oakland Children’s Hospital Enzyme Replacement Research. Despite the limitations and challenges that he faces due to his disability Aaron works hard and strives for academic excellence. He has always ranked among the top of his class and has been on the honor roll every year since 5th grade. He has consistently maintained a GPA of 3.9 and above. Aaron will graduate in June 2015 with an Advanced Regents Diploma, at the Henry Viscardi School. He intends pursuing a career in medicine and become a radiologist and is seeking to enroll in a school for medical training. He has been invited on several Ivy League School admissions interviews including but not limited to Harvard, Yale and Brown Universities.

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Another common success story shared about many students from their family members is the experience of seeing their Deaf child as a **CAPABLE, INDEPENDENT** (according to their own individual abilities) and successful child for the first time. Where families may have coddled the child, once they saw that they could be pushed to be independent, they became part of that effort. In one case, this was seen when staff insisted a child, who had difficulty walking due to his CP, was required to walk independently down a hallway on their own. He used the wall for support, and amazed his mother at his ability to ambulate without her help. Things proved to be a huge lesson for both of them. And now, eleven years later, as he prepares for his 8th Grade graduation, he independently moves throughout the building with much success and a great sense self-confidence in his ability to do so.




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**LJR** graduated from the program for students with emotional disabilities in June 2014. While in the program LJR learned to handle his frustration and develop appropriate behavior in all situations. LJR was active in the student council and was a peer mentor for other students. He is currently attending the Ziccolella Elementary/Middle School, Hastings on the Hudson. His mother called after the holidays to tell us that he had the highest average in his grade and that he is doing exceptionally well.

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**LZ** is a profoundly Deaf student who came to our 4201 school from China at the age of 10 with no knowledge of English or ASL. Through the support of Cleary School for the Deaf, she flourished to a confident self-advocate. In the Cleary Secondary Program she participated in several extra-curricular activities including Year Book, Photography and Home Coming activities. LZ proudly graduated with a Local Diploma and was accepted to the college of her choice. She is currently attending College in Rochester and pursuing a degree in technology.

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