



THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY

Presented to

Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature

Hearing On
The FY 2014-2015 Executive Budget

Tuesday, January 28, 2014

Albany, New York

www.4201schools.org ● @4201Schools

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 new 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 and in Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx, Westchester and Rochester.

We come before you today to thank the Legislature and the Governor for your longstanding support of our schools. With your help, our schools have worked through several years of difficult fiscal challenges – challenges we still confront – but we continue to work to be “part of the solution.”

We do ask that the schools serving some of the most vulnerable populations of children be given your help with our budgetary concerns. It's important on occasions like this to remind us all of the history of education in our great State.

The first school for the deaf in New York was founded in 1817; and the first school for the blind in New York admitted students for the first time in 1831. The education for deaf and blind students has been part of the New York State Constitution since 1894. Support for these children all those years and our 4201 schools from the Legislature has been without question.

The 4201 Schools Association remains committed to the responsible use of taxpayer funding while providing the best educational services to our students. Many of our schools have examined ways to reduce operational costs, and as a group we are exploring ways to combine and share services. Our schools are “state-supported,” which means we all must appreciate that taxpayer dollars help sustain our missions.

As you continue your work on a new State budget, please consider the following requests and issues on behalf of our schools and the children we serve:

1. **2014-2015 Executive Budget** – The 2014-15 Executive budget recommends an increase in school aid of 3.8%, or approximately, \$807 million, bringing the total to \$21.9 billion (exclusive of the Smart Bond initiative). We ask that any aid increases approved in school aid accompanied by a commensurate increase in the appropriation that supports students attending 4201 Schools.

The 4201 schools have been flat funded for the past 4 years, and did also bear budget cuts in the three years prior. Our staffs have seen layoffs and cuts, and our programs have struggled. Since 2008, our 11 member-schools have maintained achievement-oriented programs for our fifteen-hundred students while reducing payroll nearly 9 percent – or approximately \$7,300,000. That's a significant achievement. And while total enrollment has remained stable, state funding for our students has been reduced by \$5,400,000 (or 4 percent) since 2008-2009.

Supporting Facts

Payroll expenditures:

- 2008-09: \$82,784,499
- 2011-2012: \$75,451,045

A decrease of \$7,333,454, or 8.85 percent.

Total Funding:

- 2008-09: \$139,402,545
- 2011-12: \$133,965,454

A decrease of 5,437,091, or 3.9 percent.

2. Smart Schools Bond Act - The 2014-15 Executive budget recommends a \$2 billion general obligation bond, to fund enhanced education technology in schools for such projects as high speed broadband.

The 4201 Schools Association requests that eligibility for participation in this important effort be extended to include our schools. Our children rely on technology; Assistive technology helps remove barriers and supports children and young adults with low-incidence disabilities to achieve their full potential. Please consider the following:

“Smartboards, tablets and laptops make a difference for children attending 4201 schools too.”

- Many children with disabilities, whether cognitive, physical, or learning-related, develop skills to function independently and interact confidently with others, and often learn these skills using accessible technologies (emphasis added).¹
- In addition, technology helps keep our children safe. Many of the children at our schools are vulnerable - especially those with physical disabilities who cannot “run or hide.” Differing technologies have been deployed at each of our schools to help secure or alert children.
- Broadband and broadband enabled technologies enable youth with disabilities to overcome some of the most challenging barriers to success, including physical distance, and the ability to communicate.
- A student who has limited speech and mobility can use a special wireless keyboard device with text-to-speech functionality to offer her opinions to the class, access web based resources, and to communicate with her family and peers. These devices and broadband Internet give her a voice in the classroom and potentially in the professional world in the future. Such technology can provide students much greater autonomy.

¹ *Helping Our Children With Disabilities Succeed: What's Broadband Have To Do It?* © 2007, The Children's Partnership.
www.thechildrenspartnership.org

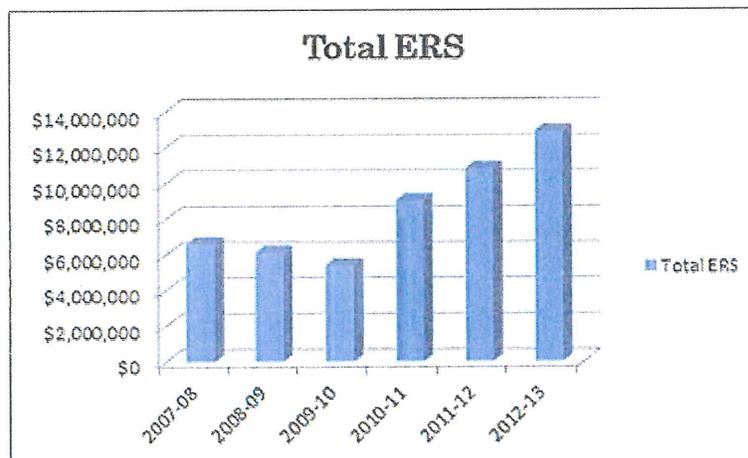
- Students with low incidence disabilities (blindness, deafness and severe physical disability) need access to technology, as it is necessary to have software and hardware that make information accessible to them.
- Technology is now elemental to how our students learn. Children at our schools will very likely receive instruction in more than one communication mode or language, such as spoken and written English, visual learning, American Sign Language, communication with assistive technology devices to facilitate language and learning, or oral, aural and speech-based training

The Governor's Smart Schools proposal is truly important and worthy; likewise, it is vitally important that children at the 4201 Schools be afforded the same opportunity for equal access to technological resources.

3. Need for Budget Increases for Mandated Costs and Program Growth

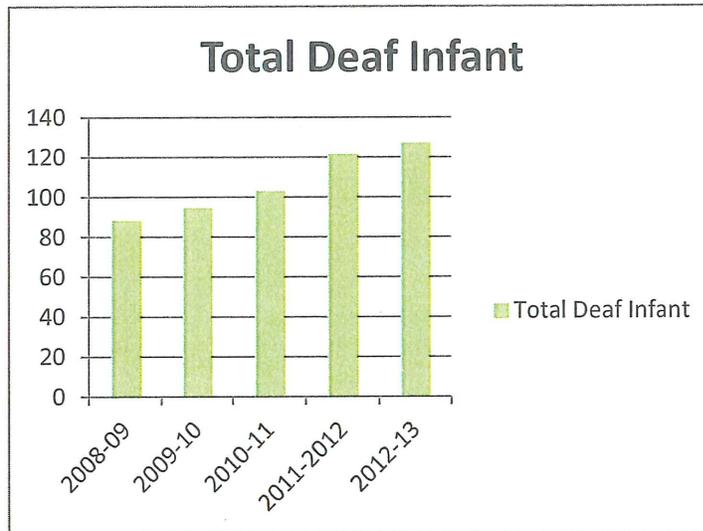
- Retirement System Costs – Like many schools and local governments testifying to your committees, the 4201 Schools continue to suffer under large annual increases in retirement system employer contributions. These unanticipated cost spikes represent real threats to the educational program at our schools, in that these take needed hundreds of thousands of dollars from our budgets. And remember, our budgets are currently capped; our schools have no ability to make these payments other than to cut programs and staff.

Overall, our eleven schools' total payments to the New York State Employees Retirement System have nearly doubled since 2007-2008, increasing from \$7,079,938 to nearly \$13,000,000 in 2012-2013 (see below):



- Deaf Infant Programs - The deaf infant programs at several of our schools are essential to ensuring that families have access to services early in a child's development. These schools can begin to serve children at birth or as soon as a hearing loss has been diagnosed – and are available until these children are ready to transition to preschool.

Staff members are certified or licensed in their specific area of expertise, and have unique qualifications to serve children with hearing loss. These programs' ultimate goal is to have each child reach his or her full potential and to give parents the tools and information they need to create an optimal learning environment, make informed choices and be a strong advocate for their child. Our deaf infant programs have operated with a flat budget for more than 7 years, while enrollment in these programs continues to rise, from 88 FTE infants in 2008-2009, to 127 FTE infants in 2012-2013 (see below).



- **Residential Programs** -The 5-day residential programs at Rochester School for the Deaf, Lexington School for the Deaf, the New York Institute for Special Education and at St. Mary's School for the Deaf offer an opportunity to those students whose educational needs require a 5-day/24-hour program, or who do not have a placement option close to home to participate in our programs during the week and return to their families on the weekend.

Students can come from all over the State, and residential programs have a strong focus on improving each individual student's academic performance and overall development. Likewise, the physical well-being and safety needs of our students are always of first priority. Our schools provide nursing staff 24-hours a day, in secure environments where staff and students create a homelike atmosphere. As with our deaf infant programs (see above), our residential programs have operated with a flat budget for more than 7 years while costs associated with children in residential care continue to rise each year.

In closing, we do also want to thank the Senate and the Assembly for your remarkable support of our schools, especially during budget discussions over the last several years.

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.

The schools for the deaf, blind and severely disabled have been partners with the State for almost 200 years. This partnership is stronger than ever because of the support you showed 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

Bernadette M. Kappen, Ph.D.
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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.