

NEW YORK
STATE
LEGISLATURETHE SENATE
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247THE ASSEMBLY
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12248

March 23, 2010

Mr. Richard Iannuzzi, President
New York State United Teachers
800 Troy-Schenectady Road
Latham, NY 12110-2455

Dear Mr. Iannuzzi:

Today, a statewide survey has revealed that if the Governor's proposed \$1.4 billion cuts to education are carried out in the 2010-11 budget it would result in nearly 15,000 teachers being laid off. Not only would these lay-offs impact classroom size, but they would also cut vital programs and cancel much needed enrichment programs that our children rely on. In light of the Senate's decision to pass a budget resolution that follows the Governor's lead and the Assembly's likely resolution that will reflect only a 50% restoration at most, we feel compelled to offer an additional course of action that would protect teachers and avoid these devastating cuts in services to children.

The "Great Recession" has impacted every level of society and has created a new economic order. While the stirrings of a recovery are just beginning to be felt now, almost every economist agrees that it will be several more years before a full recovery will occur and the benefits of a stronger economy can be enjoyed. In order to soften the blow of these economic hard times on schools and teachers, last year the Legislature repealed a popular tax credit program, curtailed expenditures in other areas of the budget and sought for and received an unprecedented single injection of federal aid. These actions were mostly successful in warding off the worst of the cuts for last year, but in December the Legislature was called back to Albany for a special session to address anticipated mid-year deficits. The budgeting mechanisms we employed were only a band-aid solution and did not address the systemic issues facing the budget gaps that have been developing over decades.

The dramatic cuts that will be included in the final budget should not be borne by our state's dedicated and hard working teachers or the students they serve. Our teachers are some of the highest paid in the nation. It reflects the high level of skill they bring to their jobs and the challenges they regularly overcome in teaching in some of the most difficult situations. Still, teachers must be part of the solution if New York is to address the long-term challenges it faces. As parents and taxpayers, we hope that the teachers will appreciate our desire to put forward a solution that will not reduce services or put an additional strain on already over-burdened taxpayers.

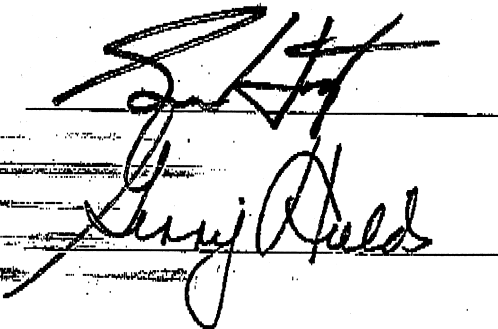
Staff salaries are the single largest fixed cost in every school budget. Last year, when private sector wages and employment were plummeting, the average base and step increment increase for teachers in school districts outside of New York City came to 5.6% according to a NYSSBA survey. While we believe that teachers ought to receive a good salary, we also believe that they must recognize, and share in, the tough choices that all New Yorkers are faced with as a result of this fiscal crisis.

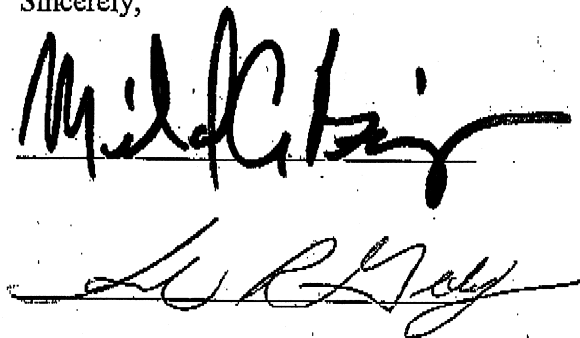
We therefore urge NYSUT and its local affiliates to assist school districts in meeting their funding challenges by considering the voluntary postponement of scheduled base and step pay increases for the 2010-11 budget year. We estimate that this action would save our school districts a total of just over \$1 billion, thereby nearly canceling the worst impacts of the proposed budget cuts.

This solution alone will help districts avoid draconian lay-offs, keep vital services in place for our children and protect programs that do so much to make our students well-rounded individuals.

We hope that you will consider this suggestion in the spirit in which it is offered, a spirit of cooperation and sincere admiration. We realize that this would be an unprecedented step for your organization to take, but these are unprecedented challenges we face. We are confident that such a sacrifice by NYSUT members would win the lasting respect and appreciation of all New Yorkers and teach a lesson that will not be lost on the next generation.

Sincerely,





cc: Gov. David Paterson
Speaker Sheldon Silver, New York State Assembly
Senator John Sampson, New York State Senate