



THE 4201 SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Testimony Presented to
Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Hearing on the 2024 Executive Budget

February 8, 2023

Albany, New York

Cleary School for the Deaf (Nesconset)
Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)
New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)
New York School for the Deaf (White Plains)
St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Buffalo)

Henry Viscardi School (Albertyon)
Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)
Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf (Mill Neck)
Rochester School for the Deaf (Rochester)
St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)

Good afternoon, Assemblymember Weinstein, Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Benedetto, Senator Mayer, and your honorable colleagues. My name is Dr. Bernadette Kappen, and I serve as chair as chair of the 4201 Schools Association. It is a pleasure to be with you today, and we are grateful for your continued support and friendship over the years.

The Association represents eleven (11) not-for-profit state-supported schools serving children who are deaf, blind, or severely physically disabled throughout New York State. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the 2024 Executive Budget as it relates to our students and schools.

We would first like to thank the Assembly and Senate for your longstanding support of our students and schools. This has been vital during the COVID-19 emergency and thereafter, as our schools have worked to maintain our students' access to education and related services. This work continues every day.

For the 2024 State Budget, we ask your support for the following priorities:

State Support - Like every other any school, we need consistent, stable, and reliable funding to meet our children's needs. We request the Legislature's support for the following:

1. ***Reject*** the Executive Budget's proposed \$2,000,000 cut and restore our schools to the levels enacted in last year's enacted budget.
2. ***Increase*** direct support by 6% (\$8,770,000). This financial support is needed to meet the needs of our student population:

The Executive Budget proposes to increase School Aid by \$2.7 billion. It is important to note that our schools are not included in these annual increases. But our schools and students bear the same - and in some cases a greater incidence - challenges as every other school – *mental health, pandemic learning loss, inflation, the Great Resignation, etc.* – and we need the State's ongoing support for children with low-incidence disabilities.

Capital Assistance - The Executive Budget also re-appropriates the \$30 million capital grant program appropriated for a second round of health and safety

projects.

We appreciate and need this support as well. Our schools were established decades ago in communities around the State by philanthropic organizations, and most of our school buildings are now older (For example, the New York School for the Deaf was founded in 1817, the New York Institute for Special Education in 1831, and the Lexington School for the Deaf in 1864). Our facilities are aging, and the needs of our students are changing.

Fund Balance - We ask the Legislature to give our schools authority to retain a small fund balance, like all other public and private schools in New York.

It's important to allow our schools to prepare financially for variances or other contingencies (emergencies, planning for or adapting to student needs throughout the school year). The recent pandemic has highlighted the need to give school leaders tools to adapt quickly and in the best interests of their students while maintaining fiscal stewardship of our operations.

And according to the State Comptroller, *“The practice of planning ahead and systematically saving for capital acquisitions and other contingencies is considered prudent management.”*

We appreciate the introduction and action on similar legislation last year: S.8314 by Senator Mannion and A.9360 by Assemblymember Benedetto (Passed Senate).

Support Salary Growth & Workforce Retention - Our schools' staff members are specially trained and certified to work with children who are deaf, blind, or severely physically disabled. But salaries for our specially qualified staff lag those in public schools.

We propose a new initiative to increase salaries for our teachers and professional staff:

- \$30 million program over three years to incrementally increase salaries to better compete with public school districts.

The 4201 Schools are proud to partner with New York State in ensuring high quality educational opportunity to students with low incidence disabilities. We take very seriously our responsibility to provide each of our students with a safe and healthy environment in which to grow and succeed. We are truly grateful for the support provided that sustains our schools and the students we serve.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernadette M. Kappen, Ph.D.
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Executive Director, New York Institute for
Special Education

Timothy M. Kelly
Co-Chair, 4201 Schools Association
Superintendent, St. Mary's School for the
Deaf



The 4201 Schools Association

*Advocating for New York State's Blind, Deaf
and Severely Physically Disabled Children*

For more than 200 years, the people of New York State have relied on the skills and expertise of the 4201 Schools to provide educational services to children who are deaf, blind and severely physically disabled. The Association represents 11 member schools across New York.

Under Section 4201 of the Education Law, the State has designated certain private non-profit schools to serve the special education needs of deaf, blind, physically disabled students or students with multiple disabilities. Students come to 4201 Schools upon application by their parents or school districts, and with the approval of the State Education Commissioner.

The leaders, teachers, counselors, therapists and all other support staff at each school are specialists in their field, and serve as a resource for policy makers, families, communities, and each other to encourage that best practices are utilized in the education of New York State students with low incidence disabilities. There are no charges or fees to parents for educational costs, transportation, room or board at 4201 schools. Our students benefit from the academic, life skills, vocational, and other specially designed programs available at our schools. Students also take part in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. 4201 Schools Association members are engaged in building opportunities for children by offering high-quality programs and through public awareness advocacy.

The 4201 Schools Association: Who We Are

- Cleary School for the Deaf (Suffolk Co.)
- Henry Viscardi School (Nassau Co.)
- Lavelle School for the Blind (Bronx)
- Lexington School for the Deaf (Queens)
- Mill Neck School for the Deaf (Nassau Co.)
- New York Institute for Special Education (Bronx)
- New York School for the Deaf (Westchester Co.)
- Rochester School for the Deaf (Monroe Co.)
- St. Joseph's School for the Deaf (Bronx)
- St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf (Brooklyn)
- St. Mary's School for the Deaf (Erie Co.)



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