

FOUR BIG EQUITY ISSUES IN THIS YEAR'S EXECUTIVE BUDGET

Following the release of Governor Cuomo's 2017-18 Executive Budget, The Education Trust–New York has identified four of the educational equity issues that policymakers should address in order to ensure a high-quality education for all New York students—especially low-income students and students of color—from early childhood through college completion.

1 FOUNDATION AID

What the budget does:

The Executive Budget increases School Aid by \$961 million, including \$428 million for Foundation Aid. The State Education Department estimates that the total remaining “phase in” of Foundation Aid would cost \$4.3 billion. However, the Executive Budget eliminates use of the Foundation Aid formula for increased funding in future years.

Our take:

The Executive Budget takes two steps backward for one step forward—with improvements to target poverty this year outweighed by the loss of predictability and transparency in future years and by not doing enough to ensure that schools serving low-income students and students of color receive the resources they need to increase achievement and opportunity.

Equity points:

- Schools should have an annual funding formula that provides a “predictable revenue stream to enhance long-term financial planning.” Those are

the words the Executive Chamber used in last year's budget proposal when it announced a “two-year plan to eliminate the [Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) that] allows school districts a *predictable revenue stream to enhance long-term financial planning and support responsible budget practices.*”

- New York's school funding system is the second most inequitable in the nation. The state should adopt the Executive Budget's formula improvements that better address poverty and district need, while also taking steps to ensure that students receive additional resources—especially in schools that serve low-income students and students of color.

2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

What the budget does:

The Executive Budget includes a \$5 million increase to expand pre-kindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds, with a focus on high-need school districts. The budget also begins a consolidation of the state's multiple pre-k programs. The Executive Budget includes no new resources to expand the state's under-funded early childhood quality initiative, QUALITYstarsNY.

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Our take:

With fewer than two-thirds of 4-year-olds enrolled in quality early learning programs and even fewer 3-year-olds having access, this new investment is a step in the right direction and should be accompanied by a multi-year funding strategy to reach truly universal and high-quality early childhood education for the students with the greatest needs. Starting to consolidate programs and strengthen standards are smart moves, and there are other critical steps that New York should take now to further streamline its pre-k programs and enhance quality across the board.

Equity points:

- Per-pupil funding levels should be adequate across all programs and settings—both school districts and community based organizations—in order to support high-quality pre-k for 3- and 4-year-olds, and the state should establish a timeline for ensuring adequate resources while expanding access to all eligible children, particularly in high-need communities.
- The state should further streamline the various pre-k programs and guarantee ongoing funding for providers who are meeting quality program standards that are independently validated.
- As part of its initial consolidation of pre-kindergarten programs, the Executive Budget would require schools districts to “agree to adopt approved quality indicators within two years.” There should not be a 2-year delay on quality, and the standards for all pre-k programs should be at least as rigorous as the evidence-based quality standards in the newer Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten Program enacted in 2014.

- The state should ensure that parents have access to information about the quality of every pre-kindergarten program, such as through full implementation of QUALITYstarsNY.

3 TEACHER EQUITY AND SUPPORT

What the budget does:

The Executive Budget expands the Governor’s Master Teachers Program and Empire State Excellence in Teaching Awards. It also makes “high quality professional development” eligible for state aid if offset by savings in instructional materials through adoption of free online curriculum resources.

Our take:

All New York State students—especially those who are starting furthest behind—need to be taught to high academic standards by strong educators. This remains a major under-addressed area of the state budget discussion.

Equity points:

- The state should ensure that all students—and especially the groups of students that have been disproportionately assigned to the least effective teachers—have access to strong and diverse educators.
- The state should support the adoption of high academic standards by developing quality aligned instructional materials to help teachers deliver rigorous and engaging instruction and by providing professional development at scale focused on the implementation and use of these materials and on actual student work.

4

TUITION-FREE COLLEGE AT SUNY AND CUNY INSTITUTIONS

What the budget does:

The Executive Budget provides \$163 million to fund a higher education affordability initiative to cover unmet tuition costs at SUNY and CUNY for full-time students with household income up to \$125,000, once the program is fully in place.

Our take:

As the budget process unfolds, we will evaluate the plan based on how low-income students, students of color and non-traditional students would benefit, and especially how it ensures that these groups of students will receive the financial, academic and other support they need for success in college and beyond.

Equity points:

- Low-income students—who may already be eligible for federal Pell grants and state TAP grants—should be able to benefit from the program, such as through resources to cover costs including fees, transportation, child care and books that too often make college out of reach.
- The state should also support the college dreams of non-traditional students—including those who attend college part-time because they cannot afford to give up their job.
- The state should hold institutions accountable for improving student success as measured by on-time graduation rates, particularly for the groups of students who are furthest behind.
- The state should encourage high-performing colleges to improve access by enrolling more low-income students, and it should ensure equitable per-student support for the institutions that serve students with the greatest needs. ■

Other Investments and Actions that Advance Equity in the Executive Budget:

- Additional funding to launch Early College High Schools, such as the proven P-TECH program
- Support for high school students to take Advanced Placement tests to earn college credit
- Enactment of the DREAM Act to support college affordability for undocumented students
- Continued oversight and aid for the East Ramapo School District
- 3-year extension of mayoral control in New York City, ensuring accountability and oversight

