FEDERAL FUNDING

FUNDING SHORT-FALLS

Federal education funding must be aligned with a federal policy that values the investment in elementary and secondary education as a principal resource for academic achievement, college and career readiness, and ultimately, America’s competitiveness in the global market place.

Congress must face the reality of ending federal shortfalls for important programs that have long struggled to operate with a serious lack of promised funding. Title I and IDEA are two main priority areas, for which NYSSBA has long encouraged and supported increased levels of federal funding. Additionally, NYSSBA stresses that any requirements or mandates newly authorized or reauthorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must be fully funded.

Title I and IDEA, which are the two major grant programs, provide critical funding toward student achievement for the majority of school districts throughout the nation. These two programs provide budget reliability to local school districts since the funds are distributed by formula and not through a competitive grants process. In order to fulfill the cost of these programs and meet the mandates, the taxpayers in local communities must pay the difference in the under-funded federal share.

Title I

Title I is the major source of federal funding for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These grants are used to fund student achievement requirements for students in low-income areas in order to provide a high-quality education in line with state standards and achievements.

Title I has been under-funded by tens of billions of dollars since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2002. Despite the enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which provided Title I with temporary additional funding, Title I has never been fully funded. ARRA did increase funding from approximately 50% to 75%, which was helpful. With the expiration of ARRA, it is again time to focus on fully funding Title I as was originally promised.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the major source of federal funding for school districts to provide educational services to students with disabilities. In New York State more than 450,000 children and students are provided services under IDEA. As the program continues to be funded below the Federal Government’s promise of 40% contribution of the average per pupil cost. Prior to ARRA, IDEA was funded at approximately 17%. While ARRA was in effect, IDEA funding was estimated to be 26%. However, upon ARRA’s expiration, IDEA will still not be fully funded. A glide path to full funding would bring IDEA to the level expected and, in fact, needed to provide educational services to those students with

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disabilities. Local school districts struggle to provide these services and taxpayers certainly cannot carry the burden of increased property taxes due in large part to the property tax levy cap. So school boards have to choose to eliminate programs, staff and extracurricular activities in order to meet students with disabilities needs.

LONG-TERM FUNDING

Fiscal challenges to education have been compounded by continuing cuts in state aid and declining local property tax base in the absence of stimulus funds. Education funding cannot be expected to return to pre-recession levels until later in this decade, yet schools are being asked not only to sustain student achievement but to increase it. For schools to succeed in the long run, school boards, policymakers, and the public need to reexamine how public education is funded at the local, state, and federal levels. The federal government needs to provide reliable and sustainable funding for public education. What that funding system looks like should be the subject of a serious national conversation.

The drive for education innovation and increased accountability is met with a new diligence for economic recovery, fiscal discipline and deficit reduction. In effect, the new goals for education established by the federal government are shaping the debate for federal education programs and the funding needed to implement them. The funding needed to fully implement the new goals of better standards and assessments, robust data systems for continuous improvement, effective teachers and leaders, and greater interventions for closing achievement gaps may not be certain, especially given the ongoing budget issues facing Congress and with historic budget shortfalls that states and schools districts are trying to address in today’s economy. The need to continue raising student achievement should not be consumed or overshadowed by budget cuts. Key investments in Title I and IDEA will help alleviate growing budget shortfalls for school districts.

Post Superstorm Sandy Transportation Aid

Federal funding through the McKinney-Vento Act is insufficient to cover the cost of transportation and services for children and youth who were homeless prior to Superstorm Sandy, let alone support the increased numbers of children who have been displaced now. Additional funding is needed to ensure that school districts can meet the urgent needs of displaced children, without having to cut other educational programs. The McKinney-Vento Act allows homeless children (including those displaced by disasters) to attend the same school, so they can maintain relationships with teachers and classmates, and continue their educational progress. For children who must be enrolled in a new school, the McKinney-Vento program facilitates smooth transitions, eliminates paperwork barriers, and connects children to essential services. Many school districts on Long Island, for example, are incurring large expenses due to the size of the geographic area and the need to use private contractors. We need to express our support for Congressman George Miller’s amendment to direct funding ($20 million) from the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) to education agencies to assist with the costs of transportation and other services for children left homeless by Superstorm Sandy.

Please urge your representative to support increased and sustainable funding for federal programs in order to ensure reliable funding for school districts as they plan local budgets annually. Also, please urge your representative to continue to support legislation which provides funding for Title I and IDEA. Title I funding needs to be increased and should not revert back to pre-ARRA levels. The federal share of costs for special education must be fully funded. Finally, ask your representative to support the Miller amendment to assist with the costs of transportation and other services for children impacted by Superstorm Sandy.