



- Agudath Israel of America
- Association of Christian Schools International / New York
- Jewish Education Project
- Lutheran Schools Association
- NYS Association of Independent Schools
- NYS Catholic Conference

March 16, 2020

To: The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
The Honorable Members of the NYS Legislature

Re: COVID-19 Mitigation for Religious & Independent Schools

COVID-19 is indiscriminate in its adverse effects on individuals and communities. As part of your on-going response to the virus, you appropriately waived the 180-day instructional requirement in order to hold harmless public schools that would otherwise be subject to a reduction in their state aid.

As you attempt to finalize a State Budget in the coming days and establish the means of allocating federal emergency funds, we urge you to enact the following emergency protections for the religious and independent school community:

1. Ensure that religious and independent schools are held harmless against the potential loss of Mandated Services Aid attributable to actions schools are required to take in response to COVID-19 such as not administering state assessments. We offer the following new (underscored) appropriation language:

For nonpublic school aid payable in the 2020-21 state fiscal year. Provided that nonpublic schools shall continue to receive aid based on either a 5.0/5.5 hour standard instructional day, or another work day as certified by the nonpublic school officials, in accordance with the methodology for computing salary and benefits applied by the department in paying aid for the 2012-13 and prior school years, and provided further that no school shall receive less aid than the highest of their aid in last three years for expenses associated with the administration of state assessments and/or other expenses not incurred as a result of actions taken in response to COVID-19. Notwithstanding any provision of law, rule or regulation to the contrary, the amount appropriated herein represents the maximum amount payable during the 2020-21 state fiscal year (21769) 119,122,000

2. Create a new, one-time \$535 million COVID-19 Mitigation Grant Program to reimburse religious and independent schools for extraordinary expenses attributable exclusively to the response to COVID-19 for which emergency federal funds are now available. These expenses include the deep-cleaning of schools (\$15 million) and the transition to on-line instructional for some 400,000 students (\$1,200 - \$1,500 per student). We offer the following appropriation language:

For services and expenses of nonpublic schools associated with extraordinary actions undertaken in the 2019-20 school year necessary to mitigate against COVID-19 \$535,000,000

3. Expand flexibility and increase the appropriation available under the Non-Public School Safety Equipment (NPSE) appropriation to ensure schools can be reimbursed for on-going expenses associated with the mitigation of public health threats and addressing other health, safety and security needs. We offer the following language:

NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL HEALTH AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT PROJECTS (CCP)....30,000,000

For services and expenses of pupil health and mental health services, mitigation of public health threats, criminal history checks of school personnel, critical capital needs and remediation of hazardous conditions, and safety equipment, security personnel, ~~and~~ related assessments, and training needs and other critical services in support of the health and safety of school building occupants as may be identified by the commissioner and approved by the director of the budget \$30,000,000

We are enormously grateful to you for your swift and sweeping response to this evolving crisis and urge that all school communities are afforded equal protections and services to mitigate the impact of this virus. We pledge our support of your on-going efforts to protect and serve all New York State residents.