

**Westchester Putnam School Boards  
Association Resolution TEMPLATE:  
Reform Governor Cuomo's 2015  
Opportunity Agenda for Education**

March 18, 2015

Whereas, there is agreement with Governor Cuomo that “access to education, from pre-kindergarten through college, can pave the way to economic and social opportunities- to better jobs and more successful lives,” many of the proposals in the Governor’s 2015 Opportunity Agenda are untenable and will have significant negative consequences.

Whereas, most schools in New York State successfully educate our children and prepare them for college, career and good citizenship, the Governor’s proposals are based on a premise that our schools and our teachers are failing our students. While failing schools and the link to issues of poverty require special attention, this one size fits all approach is inappropriate, costly, and counter-productive.

Whereas, the Governor states that there has been an unprecedented increase in state education aid over the last three fiscal years, in reality, the State dramatically cut education aid in 2010 and, has continued to underfund education while addressing its own deficit by redirecting state education funding through the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). In Westchester and Putnam, 47% of school districts received less state aid this year than in 2008. Since its inception, \$8.8 billion statewide, and \$403 million in Westchester and Putnam, has been lost to the State under the GEA; the Chappaqua Central School District alone has lost \$5,593,266.

Whereas, the State has a surplus this year, there is no indication that the GEA will end in 2015-16. In point of fact, the \$1.1 billion which the Governor promises if his reform agenda is approved could cover the \$1.04 billion in GEA outstanding statewide for 2014-15.

Whereas, Governor Cuomo asserts that his proposed reforms would encourage the most talented college graduates to consider teaching as a career, the proposed lock-step, standardized evaluation system which has no parallel in any other profession, would dissuade, not encourage, the most talented.

Whereas Congress, in working to re-authorize ESEA, is looking to de-couple high stakes assessments and teacher evaluations, address the punitive aspects of NCLB, and allow for more local accountability and flexibility, the Governor is proposing a rigid, standardized test-oriented model that will further diminish local authority.

Whereas, Governor Cuomo proclaims that the State will “enhance the teacher evaluation system to accord teachers and the profession the respect they deserve,” he sets forth an evaluation system that denigrates the professionalism of teachers and administrators and establishes a narrow, one-size-fits-all model. For grades 4-8, the proposed evaluation system would base 50% of the score on an annual state assessment (with a sample size of approximately 25) and 50% on at least two observations, one of which must be done by a trained administrator, independent evaluator or SUNY/CUNY faculty member and will be weighted at 35% of the 50%, with the remaining 15% allocated to an observation by a school administrator. A class score on the standardized test must equate to effective or higher for the teacher to be rated effective or highly effective (thus the tests core trumps everything else). Effective teaching is more than the sum of one standardized assessment and two formal observations. School boards and communities trust their local school district officials to implement an accountability system that appropriately evaluates staff and incorporates comprehensive professional supports. The requirement to employ an independent evaluator establishes a new, expensive unfunded mandate that compromises administrator authority and will siphon school district funds from the classroom and/or professional development.

Whereas, the Governor is proposing a new teacher tenure process which will require five *consecutive years of an effective or highly effective rating, the evaluation system measures are problematic and policies such as LIFO remain in effect. Nevertheless, a five year probationary period is more appropriate, and the proposed language indicating that districts retain authority to dismiss probationary teachers at any time for any reason is a necessary clarification to 3012c.*

Whereas, the current “expedited” 3020-a hearing process remains costly, time-consuming and often ineffective, the proposed changes would shift the presumption in favor of the administrator, strengthen evidentiary standards, and streamline the process. The same presumption of trust for the local administrator should be incorporated into the teacher evaluation proposal.

Whereas, we share a commitment to universal high-quality early education, the current practice of reimbursing districts rather than providing seed money makes it difficult for high need school districts to initiate or expand a pre-K program. It is imperative that future initiatives include start-up funding and a front-loaded payment schedule.

Whereas, Westchester is home to six Special Act School Districts which cannot appropriately meet the needs of their unique student population under the current tuition methodology, and there is no language in the 2015-16 NYS budget to address their needs, we support the inclusion of language establishing annual increases to the tuition rate.

Whereas, Governor Cuomo's 2015 Opportunity Agenda includes the Education Investment Tax Credit which defacto shifts money from public education to private while public school districts are underfunded by NYS, we support using public dollars for public education.

Whereas, charter schools were initially intended as lab schools for innovation, have not proven to out-perform regular public schools and many do not mirror the local community in their enrollment and retention practices, and whereas, NYS grants the charter but local school districts are financially impacted, we rebuff the Governor's proposal to raise the charter cap by 100.

Whereas, mayoral control has had mixed results nationally, we support the concept of local control and reject the Governor's suggestion that it be expanded beyond New York City.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Board of Education of the Chappaqua Central School District urges State Legislators to review these proposals in details, gather input from research and from those in the field, and rebuff the elements of the Cuomo Education Reform Agenda which will instill inappropriate measures of accountability and negatively impact the classroom learning environment and local control.