

**TESTIMONY PREPARED BY STUDENT ADVOCACY
REGARDING THE 2008-09 NEW YORK STATE BUDGET
DECEMBER 2007**

We appreciate Governor Spitzer's and the NYS Division of Budget's opportunity to provide input concerning the 2008-09 Budget. Since we were unable to attend any of the public hearings, we are presenting our comments online.

For 25 years, Student Advocacy, a not-for-profit organization, has worked to help Westchester and Putnam children who are experiencing a range of school problems get back on track to school success. While most of our funding comes from private individuals and small family foundations, we do receive some funding from two New York State offices: Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP) through the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and Family Support Program through the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD). For us, these two funding streams are administered by county and regional offices respectively.

For years, we have advocated for major increases in three key funding streams for youth services: Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (YDDP), SDPP (see above) and Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA). Why do we persist in this advocacy effort? We strongly believe that quality youth development including advocacy services, after school and other out-of-school time (OST) programs for children and adolescents help keep kids safe, support working families and provide children and youth with important learning, personal development, arts and recreational opportunities. These programs are a critical component of a strong system of public education and youth development.

Studies show that youth development programs help reduce youth crime and violence, drug use and teen pregnancies, and that students who regularly attend quality after school programs have better school attendance records and are more likely to succeed in school. A recent 4-H study of positive youth development indicated that all youth, regardless of where they live, their family situations, their socioeconomic status, and their race or gender, have the capacity to thrive. Findings also show that when communities, families and schools provide access to youth development programs as well as opportunities for sustained adult interaction and mentoring, youth experience success.

Another national organization worth listening to is Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, which is made up of more than 3,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, other law enforcement leaders, and violence survivors. In a 2007 position paper entitled, "From America's Front Line Against Crime: A School and Youth Violence Prevention Plan", they state: "Quality youth development programs can cut crime immediately and transform the 3 PM to 6 PM period of prime time for juvenile crime into hours of academic enrichment, wholesome fun and community service. They protect both kids and adults from becoming victims of crime, and cut smoking and drug use, while helping youngsters develop the respect, discipline and skills they need to become contributing citizens."

According to the New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN), the need for quality after school opportunities in New York State far outstrips the supply. While the major state and city after school and school age care programs serve approximately 400,000 children and youth, it is estimated that an additional 600,000 are without adult supervision in the after school hours, and that a substantial portion of these children, as well as many more who are supervised, would enroll in after school programs if they were available.

It is time for New York State to maximize the promise of youth development programs by establishing a more comprehensive, fully-funded public policy framework. We endorse NYSAN's guiding principles for statewide after school funding:

1. Coordinate existing state and federal after school and school-age child care funding streams to integrate or better align procedures.
2. Increase funding and reduce categorical restrictions to ensure that programs have sufficient resources to cover the full costs of high-quality programming.
3. Provide a sustained and dependable funding source for programs which meet high standards of programmatic quality and administrative accountability.
4. Eliminate barriers to the blending of funds from multiple public and private sources.
5. Provide sufficient local flexibility and control to ensure programming meets local needs.
6. Examine the role of matching fund requirements to encourage localities to match state contributions while allowing flexibility in program-level match requirements.

As an initial step towards fully meeting the large need for additional quality youth development opportunities, Student Advocacy proposes that the 2008-09 NYS Budget

1. Increases funding for YDDP to \$40 million to fully fund the existing statutory formula. Budget language should be enacted to amend the per capita funding levels to account for inflation and other cost increases going forward.
2. Increases funding for SDPP to \$15 million. Note that in 1988, this funding stream was almost at \$13.9 million, but by 2006 it was at \$9.3 million.
3. Increases funding for RHYA to \$9 million. The demands on RHYA programs have grown due to changes in the way communities refer potential PINS youth to emergency shelter, alternative crisis intervention, transitional living and respite services.
4. Increases funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to \$35 million. SYEP helps to develop the workforce of the future, contribute to the State's economy, and pay for jobs that are essential to their communities.
5. Increase funding for the Advantage After School program to \$40 million. Since its inception, this program has received more qualified applications than it can fund.

Since 1991, when major cuts were made in the YDDP funding stream, there has been no sustained restoration of funds for our state's locally planned and delivered youth services system. By increasing allocations for these funding streams that support programs for children and youth, New York State can demonstrate that it believes that youth development programs do matter and that it understands that prevention is extremely cost effective in avoiding expensive services like foster care, institutions and jail!

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