



NYSUT TALKING POINTS: Where we stand on the governor's proposed 2011-12 state budget and tax cap

Below are key talking points to make in meetings with your legislators. It's essential to elaborate on these main themes by sharing the impact cuts have had — and will have — in your local and on the students and communities we serve. NYSUT's detailed budget analyses provide additional specifics that you may cite and updates will continue to appear on Leader Access and the NYSUT website, www.nysut.org.

Additional specific points for constituent groups will be made available for targeted lobbying visits and through the leader site.

I. THE BUDGET PROPOSAL WOULD DEVASTATE PUBLIC SERVICES.

The Executive Budget proposal would devastate our schools, campuses and health care facilities by imposing massive cuts on public education and health care — the worst in a generation.

NYSUT members are doing everything they can to provide the services students need — finding cost-savings and economies of scale and dealing with the impact of layoffs and position losses. NYSUT and our locals have made it clear we are willing to work locally and at the state level to preserve essential services, but we can't cut our way to educational excellence.

II. SCHOOLS WOULD BE HARD HIT AFTER ALREADY EXPERIENCING WAVES OF CUTS AND LOSS OF POSITIONS.

Schools would be cut 7.3 percent. The proposed \$1.5 billion cut is the largest total dollar state aid cut ever proposed in the history of New York state and an amount so large it would send our schools into reverse gear, with state support that would be less than in the 2007-2008 school year.

These cuts would affect class size, course offerings, support services, counseling, library services and every measure of quality used in education.

These proposed cuts are three times the size of last year's draconian cut, which resulted in 10,000 positions eliminated statewide.

III. HIGHER EDUCATION WOULD BE HAMMERED AT A TIME WHEN IT IS NEEDED MORE THAN EVER AS THE ENGINE TO RECOVERY.

A destructive 10 percent cut for SUNY, CUNY and our community colleges after three straight years of enormous cuts would jeopardize quality and access to higher education and would wreak havoc on campuses already reeling from years of underfunding.

The elimination of the \$154 million state subsidy to SUNY teaching hospitals would destabilize and potentially jeopardize their very existence and hurt our most vulnerable citizens and those who depend on these lifelines in their communities.

If this higher education budget is enacted, SUNY and CUNY will continue to experience cuts far deeper than those imposed on any other state agencies during this fiscal crisis. For example, under this proposal, SUNY would lose one-third of its annual operating budget in just three years.

The SUNY/CUNY flexibility proposals won't replace critical state funding and would only serve to privatize our public universities and endanger their essential mission.

These cuts to higher education would have a devastating impact on our ability to halt any future deterioration in access and academic quality and are contrary to the governor's mission to create jobs and economic prosperity in New York state.

IV. A DAMAGING TAX CAP WOULD FOREVER HURT NEW YORK'S SCHOOLS AND THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

New Yorkers want and need tax relief. Ill-conceived and irresponsible tax caps provide only the illusion of relief. If you have difficulty paying your property taxes or believe your taxes are too high, a tax cap will not help you. It is a gimmick.

The proposed tax cap would erode democracy — because 41 percent of the electorate could veto a tax increase supported by the majority.

A cap of 2 percent or the rate of inflation — whichever is less — would have a permanent, chilling effect on a community's ability to fund its schools. Communities most in need would be horribly penalized by a cap that they would not be able to override, widening an achievement gap that we are succeeding in closing.

V. WE CAN'T JUST CUT OUR WAY OUT OF THIS HOLE.

Even as these deep cuts are proposed for public services, the wealthiest 3 percent of New Yorkers continue to enjoy a multi-billion dollar tax cut. There is an alternative to this recipe for disaster: By closing corporate loopholes and extending the millionaires' tax, a plan supported by more than two-thirds of New Yorkers, these devastating cuts could be mitigated.

VI. DON'T ERASE OUR PROGRESS!

The simple truth is New York's public education system is among the country's best.

SUNY, CUNY and their community colleges are engines to the state's economic development — in growing jobs, initiating cutting edge research and creating the educated workforce for which New York is renowned. Enrollments are soaring and access must not be compromised.

And New York is *not* 34th in educational achievement. The so-called "34th in the nation" canard has been traced back to the 2007 Census that contains a mushy category called "total educational achievement." That refers to the whole citizenry, lumping together senior citizens who left school in the 1950s with immigrants who arrived in this country as adults, not speaking English, with students still struggling to obtain their high school diploma. Additionally, New York has both unique diversity and deeper poverty not generally found in other states. An adjacent chart in the *very same Census report* shows New York ranks well above other states with nearly 32 percent of its residents holding at least a bachelor's degree.

When it comes to current educational attainment, New York is soaring. *Education Week*, an independent and widely respected education watchdog, says when it comes to student performance, the Empire State repeatedly rates near the nation's top.

In its recently released annual state-by-state "Quality Counts" guide, *Education Week* ranks the Empire State:

- No. 1 in the nation in working to close the achievement gap between students in high-income and low-income districts — an issue on which NYSUT has long taken the lead.
- No. 2 nationwide in overall student performance, just behind Maryland. This ranking is a far more meaningful measure of educational quality compared to data from the U.S. Census since the Education Week score factors in multiple areas of education policy and student performance.

FINALLY: Fully 79 percent of New Yorkers steadfastly say public education should not be cut — even in the midst of these tough economic times.