



LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION  
OF NEW YORK STATE

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STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR'S  
PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS TO EDUCATION

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) is a parent-driven statewide organization, providing advocacy and support services to thousands of individuals with learning disabilities, neurological impairments and other related disabilities, and their families. Because learning disabilities are developmental, neurobiological disorders, they frequently manifest themselves in all aspects of the lives of the individuals affected by such disorders. Their impact upon an individual's ability to be independent and self-sufficient can be, and often is, profound.

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LDA is strongly committed to ensuring that the educational needs of all of our state's children are appropriately met. Indeed, history has consistently demonstrated that access to appropriate educational services can and does translate into higher functional levels of lifetime independence for individuals with learning and other developmental disabilities. However, Governor Pataki's proposed 2003-04 budget for education, with its targeted cuts in special education funding, will result in significant erosion of the full continuum of educational services now available to meet the individual needs of students with learning and other developmental disabilities. Therefore, LDA cannot support the Governor's proposed budget for education.

LDA believes (and the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act guarantees) that students with disabilities must receive a free and appropriate education based on their individual needs. In order to meet each child's specific needs, a full continuum of educational programs and funding for those programs must be made available. Some students with disabilities will succeed in a regular classroom while others need the individualized services of a resource room or even a private school setting. There is ample research-based evidence demonstrating the significant, long-term cost-benefit of providing students with early access to this full continuum of educational services, in a way that is responsive to individual levels of need, so that they can achieve maximum levels of independence, and avoid costlier services that may otherwise become necessary in adulthood.

For all of these reasons LDA cannot support the Governor's proposed cuts to education, even in this difficult fiscal environment. Beyond their negative impact upon the educational future of all of our children, they will translate into an escalating need for long-term adult supports and services, and resultant needs for increased funding to support those long term needs. Therefore, LDA proposes the following, as an alternative to the Executive's education budget proposal:

**Restoration of the Governor's proposed \$1.2 billion cut in school aid:** Working together, the Legislature and the Governor must identify creative measures that will ensure sufficient funding to appropriately meet the individual educational needs of all our students.

**Restoration of funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten:** Every child deserves the benefits of

early childhood education. Preservation of these funds promotes the goal of statewide access for all children, and respects the overwhelming evidence that recognizes the cost-benefit of early education intervention.

**Restoration of funding for Teacher's of Tomorrow Program:** Quality teacher recruitment, training and support are at the heart of quality education services for all students.

**Preservation of special education funds as a dedicated funding stream:** Maintaining the integrity of funds that have heretofore been dedicated to meeting the needs of students with disabilities is essential to assure successful educational outcomes for those students. The full accountability for the expenditure of those funds, which an identified funding stream permits, is an added fiscal benefit. Finally, and most importantly, a discrete funding stream safeguards the vital purpose for which these funds have always been intended.

**Restoration of Excess Cost Aid State reimbursement formula for private school placements:** The proposed reduction in the amount of state reimbursement to counties for referrals of certain students with learning and other developmental disabilities to private school placements, will punish counties for deciding, after careful consideration of all available options and supports that the educational needs of individual students are best met through such placements. Intolerable financial burdens will be imposed upon counties through the proposed reduction in state reimbursement, resulting in a denial of appropriate educational services to the State's most complex students. Restoration of excess cost aid reimbursement to existing levels will ensure that all of our State's students receive the individual educational supports they need to meet the increasingly rigorous standards and goals, which New York has set for them.

**Restoration of funding for reduced class size.** At the very least, funding for this initiative must be maintained at the 2002-2003 budget level. New York is already one of the 10 states in the nation having the largest average elementary classrooms. Increases in successful outcomes for all students in smaller classrooms versus larger classrooms have been well documented. Therefore adequate resources for this important initiative must be identified and preserved.