



June 29, 2011

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Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
State Capitol
Executive Chamber
Albany, New York 12224

**Trustees of the
Board of Education**

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We are writing to request your approval of legislation, S.4067-A, that would enable the Yonkers Public Schools to restore a vital early childhood education program, namely our school-based Pre-Kindergarten, which has shown documented academic success for our four-year-old children.

The current fiscal crisis in the State and in our City has greatly impacted the delivery of critical educational programs and services for Yonkers schoolchildren next year, forcing us to scale back to only essential, required services. As a result, the District will be forced to eliminate our longstanding and highly regarded Pre-Kindergarten Program, compromising its educational benefit for over 2,000 youngsters.

This legislation will provide Yonkers the one-year relief necessary to continue our very successful early childhood program while the economy recovers from this unprecedented crisis.

Yonkers Pupil Growth, Student Demographics and the Pre-K Program

In the 2010-11 school year, the Yonkers Public Schools educated over 25,000 pupils in grades Pre-K to 12, with nearly 70% of our students living in poverty and over 16% of the student population identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) pupils. Demographic trends indicate student growth will continue in the Yonkers school system, particularly in the early grades. The increase of 342 Pre-K pupils anticipated for next year will bring 2011-12 Pre-K enrollment to 2,049 pupils. The percentage of Pre-K pupils in Yonkers identified as ELL/LEP (24%) is significantly higher than the school district's K-12 ELL/LEP population.

While Pre-K children are not eligible for ELL/LEP State-mandated services, the Yonkers City School District provides bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) services as needed to its Pre-K children either by bilingual instruction or instruction in the child's native language. This Early Language Learner acquisition initiative has shown significant success in reducing the number of children identified for ELL/LEP services in Kindergarten and beyond.

Yonkers School District's Academic Success

The Yonkers Public Schools is currently the only Big 5 School District in good academic standing, and we have demonstrated marked achievement gains in our grades 3-8 State testing program as well as in our District's high school graduation cohort. We recently conducted an evaluation of our Pre-K Program which revealed that across 10 years of data, overall by grade and across all subgroups, students who attended Pre-K Programs in Yonkers outperformed their counterparts on all measures. Particularly noteworthy in this evaluation were the academic achievements of the Pre-K pupils who made the most substantial gains: those living in poverty, classified as disabled, and children who are not English language dominant.

Figures 1-4 represent linear regression analyses, comparing the grade 4 New York State Assessment Performance of Yonkers students who attended Pre-K versus those who did not. Similar results were found at the grade 8 level.

Figure 1: Percent of Students At or Above Proficiency (level 3 or 4 score) on the Grade 4 ELA and Math Examinations, 1999-2009.

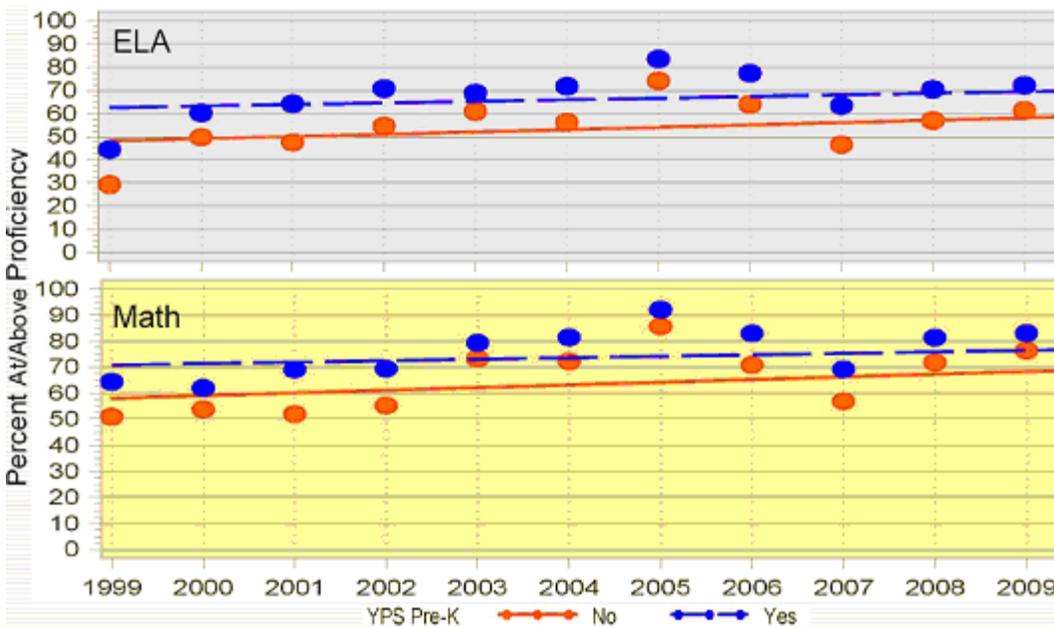


Figure 2: Percent of Students eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Lunch who achieved Proficiency (a Level 3 or 4 score) on the ELA Grade 4 Examination, 1999-2008.

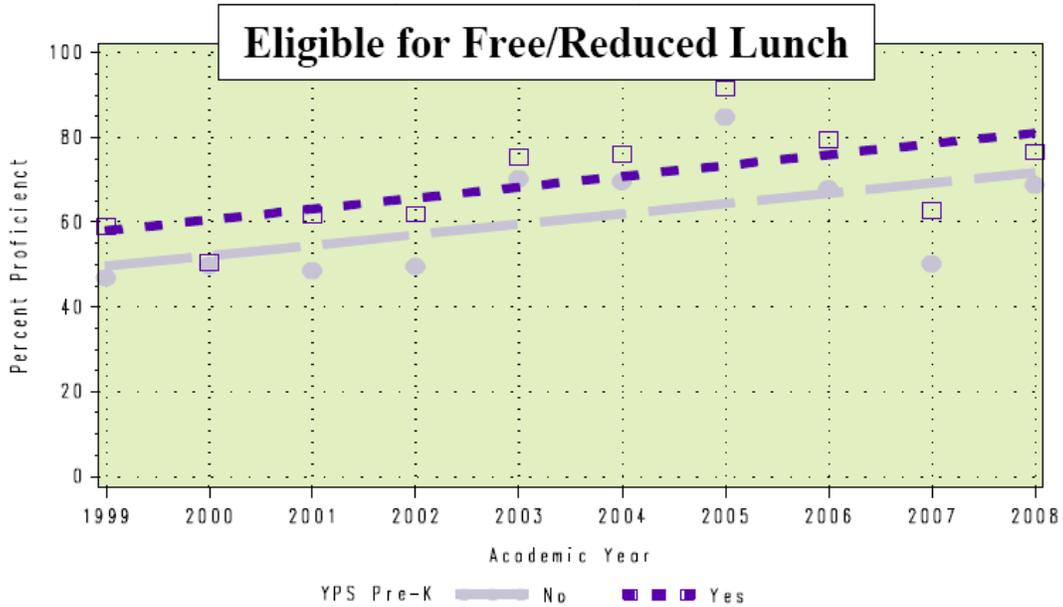


Figure 3: Percent of Students with Disabilities who achieved Proficiency (a Level 3 or 4 score) on the ELA Grade 4 Examination, 1999-2008.

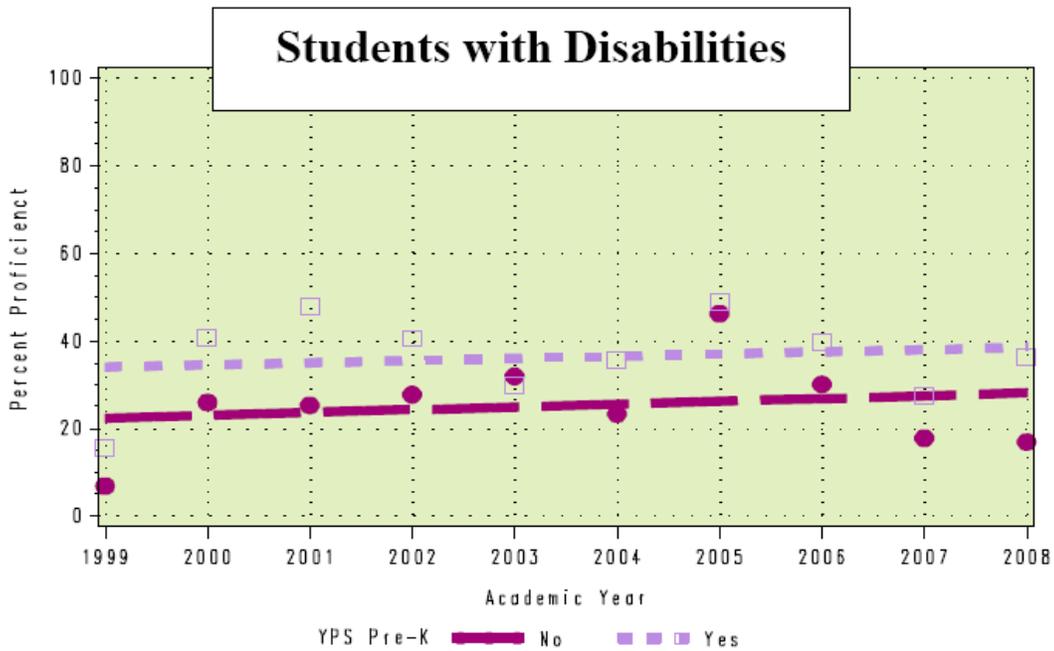
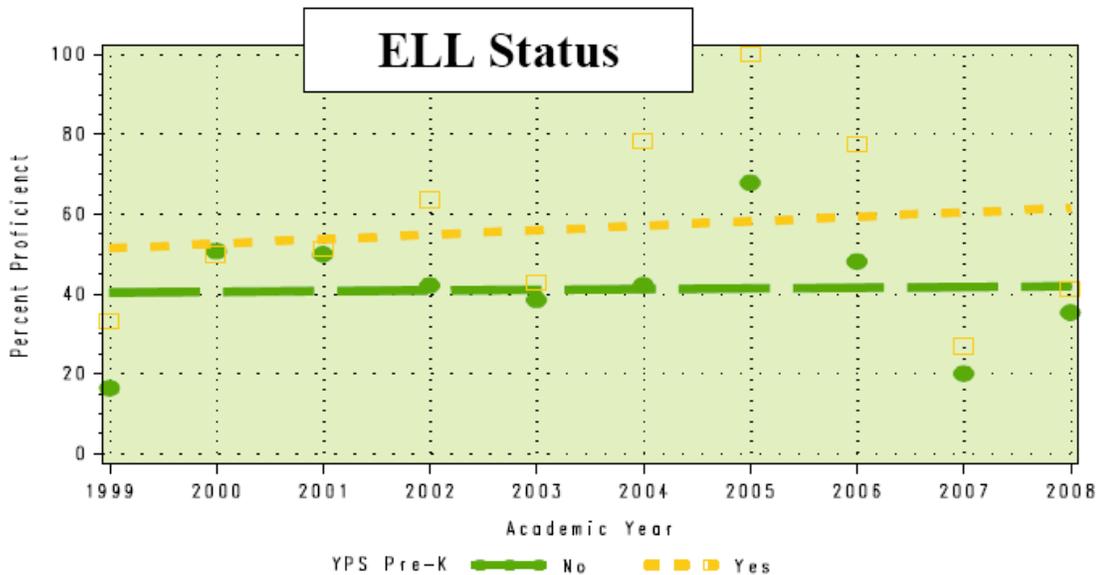


Figure 4: Percent of Students with ELL status who achieved Proficiency (a Level 3 or 4 score) on the ELA Grade 4 Examination, 1999-2008.



S.4067-A Impact on the Yonkers School System

The Yonkers Public Schools face a \$6 million State Aid cut next year on top of a freeze in State School Aid this year. Over two years, enrollment in the District has grown by 1,178 pupils and 1,136 more students are projected for this September.

This measure, which would permit the City of Yonkers to borrow to cover necessary one time increased payments to the New York State Teachers’ Retirement System, would yield an approximate \$5 million benefit to the Yonkers Public Schools in 2011-12. The \$5 million would allow us to restore a half-day, primarily school-based, Pre-Kindergarten Program serving more than 2,000 four-year-old children. The \$5 million would also allow us to meet the local effort required under the State’s Universal Pre-K Program and access the \$4.27 million allocated to Yonkers in the 2011-12 adopted State Budget for Pre-K. We estimate the cost of a half-day Pre-K Program for 2,049 pupils to total approximately \$9.395 million including expenses for teacher salaries and benefits, school aides, expanded use of community based partnership organizations, instructional materials, professional development and transportation services.

Justification for Approval

Last year, as part of the adopted 2010-11 State Budget, a similar provision was adopted for all municipalities and school districts in regard to the New York State and Local Employees' Retirement System. While school districts were permitted to participate in the ERS relief legislation last year, the TRS cost increases were proportionally greater, yet unrecognized. These expenses continue to be more significant for school districts than ERS costs and, therefore, temporary relief from the TRS increase would be of greater benefit to our District.

Furthermore, similar relief to that provided under S.4067-A was granted in the 2011-12 adopted State Budget for the SUNY Hospitals, thereby recognizing their extreme circumstances under this dire fiscal environment.

S. 4067-A affords us a one-year stop gap measure to accommodate the increases in these retirement expenses without jeopardizing a critical early childhood program. Given the State's commitment to increased State Aid in 2012-13 and actions being taken locally, we have no intention of pursuing borrowing for more than one year's impact. It would be tremendously disheartening if the Yonkers City School District was the only large urban district to withdraw from providing a Pre-K program next year.

Impact on the Property Tax Cap Law

We see no reason to conclude that the debt service costs associated with borrowing for this obligation would be excluded under the property tax cap law recently enacted and applicable to the 2012-13 municipal budget. We will factor in these costs as a component of our operating expenses next year in compliance with the newly enacted property tax cap legislation.

For all of the above cited reasons, we urge your approval of S.4067-A. Thank you for your consideration of our position on this matter.

Sincerely,



Paresh Patel
President, Yonkers Board of Education



Bernard P. Pierorazio
Superintendent, Yonkers Public Schools

- C: Senator Martin Golden
- Assemblyman Peter Abbate, Jr.
- Merryl Tisch
- John King
- Robert Megna
- Katherine Grainger
- Jim Malatras