

Dear Regent:

I am writing because of my concern that approved private special education schools are not receiving adequate compensation for educating New York's most vulnerable children. These 4410 special education preschools and 853 school-age programs educate children who are placed there by the school districts' Committees on Special Education or Preschool Special Education, because their school districts can't provide the necessary supports for a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Unfortunately, years of \$0 tuition increases have left 4410 and 853 schools unable to pay their staff anywhere near a competitive wage or keep pace with rising costs and have forced some schools to close. Since 2012, while general education funding has increased by 42%, 853 schools have received 22% in increases and 4410 schools have received just 8%.

Ironically, many of the 4410 and most 853 schools, which educate children whose needs far surpass the children in school districts' special education programs, have tuition rates far below that received by school districts. As a result, while our teachers are required to have the same certifications as public school district teachers, the average salary for 4410 and 853 teachers is \$36,000 per year lower. Additionally, 4410 and 853 teachers work a twelve-month school year, compared to the ten-month school year for school district teachers, and receive a fraction of the fringe benefits public school teachers receive. To make matters worse, 4410 and 853 schools which are operating on interim tuition rates, are not given any approved increases while they wait for SED to certify their tuition rates. Even though 4410 schools have been given 2% tuition increases in each of the last four years, there are some schools who have not received any increases for the past three years. Similarly, there are 853 schools which have not received increases for the past three years.

Understandably, 4410 and 853 teachers are leaving at an alarming rate. Despite significant efforts, these schools often don't even get resumes to fill vacant positions. The current statewide average vacancy rate is 28% in both 4410 and 853 schools and the average statewide turnover rates have grown to 26% and 31% respectively. With a shortage of seats, due to the scarcity of teachers willing to accept such low salaries and inferior benefits packages, our most vulnerable children are being denied FAPE.

**Our 4410 and 853 special education schools request that the following be included in SED's rate letter to be sent to DOB on or around April 15<sup>th</sup> 2019:**

- **\$15M for teacher recruitment and retention funding.** This cash infusion will narrow but not close the gap between their salaries and school district salaries (which would take \$150M to close, but it's a start.) We recognize that the current recommendation is \$4M but this is nowhere near enough to have even the slightest impact.
- **A tuition increase comparable with the general school aid increase.**

We are grateful for the support that the Board of Regents has shown our approved schools and look to you again to help save our schools. We provide FAPE to New York's most vulnerable children and our students need your support!