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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**NYSUT prepares legal action, calls on state leaders to stop cuts to schools**

**ALBANY, N.Y.** Sept. 9, 2020 — As students return to school this week, New York State United Teachers decried state cuts to education and called on the Legislature and governor to take immediate steps to stop 20 percent reductions in aid for school districts. Citing the state Constitution’s requirement to provide every student a sound, basic education, the union said that it will take legal action against the state if it follows through with plans to withhold hundreds of millions of dollars later this month.

Those cuts — combined with years of funding shortfalls and the increased cost of operating schools during the COVID-19 pandemic — would disproportionately impact high-need, low-wealth school districts and potentially violate students’ right to a sound, basic education.

“No school district or student is immune to the adverse impacts of a 20 percent cut to state education aid,” NYSUT President Andy Pallotta said. “But what makes this all the more egregious is the disproportionate impact that cuts have on our neediest schoolchildren. We quite literally can’t wait any longer for action. In the absence of the federal government finally doing what’s right, the state needs to step in and prevent the decimation of our public education system at a time when needs are higher than ever before.”

As NYSUT continues to advocate alongside state leaders for passage of the federal HEROES Act, which would provide much-needed stimulus funding for public education and other essential public services, the union said leaders cannot afford to delay any longer in considering state-level steps to address the fiscal crisis school districts are facing. Whether it is using rainy day and settlement funds or enacting new revenue raisers, such as taxes on the ultrawealthy, NYSUT believes the Legislature and governor must find a way to stave off significant cuts to schools, particularly as they face myriad new challenges and needs with reopening amid the coronavirus pandemic.

“The solution to this problem can’t be shifting the cuts from district to district,” Pallotta said. “Simply put, New York needs a bigger pie, which state leaders can create by asking the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share toward public services like education.”

At stake is a reduction of hundreds of millions of dollars in state aid for school districts later this month. This would disproportionately decimate poorer school districts in urban, suburban and rural communities alike. The

poorest 10 percent of school districts receive some 80 percent of their funding from the state, while the richest 10 percent of districts receive only 10 percent of their funding from the state.

Over the course of the school year, the poorest 10 percent of districts would be in line to lose $847 million in state aid ($3,779 per pupil) with 20 percent cuts made across the board, while the richest 10 percent would lose $42 million ($458 per pupil). For example, rural Salmon River, which has the lowest combined wealth ratio in the state, would see a $3,876 reduction in aid per pupil. In suburban Brentwood, where 84 percent of students qualify for free-and-reduced price lunch, a 20 percent cut would work out to $3,069 per pupil over the course of the year. Buffalo, the state’s second largest district and among the neediest, would see a $4,876 reduction in per pupil aid.

In response to the financial crunch, many school districts are already considering or making staffing cuts that only serve to reduce student access to academic and other essential services. In New York City, leaders threatened 9,000 layoffs last month if the cuts go through. In Albany, more than 220 people are to be laid off, while in Schenectady, more than 330 employees, including 10 percent of all district teachers, were laid off days before the first day of school. The financial pain is being felt elsewhere, too, with 17 teachers laid off in Norwich and 57 total staff members cut in Copiague.

“We’ve already seen some districts make hasty decisions to slash their budgets in anticipation of a major state cut later this month,” Pallotta said. “But this isn’t just about jobs. It’s about what’s left for students when the dust settles as we see the loss of teachers and paraprofessionals who serve vital roles. The state must stop this madness.”

*New York State United Teachers is a statewide union with more than 600,000 members in education, human services and health care. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and the AFL-CIO.*

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