

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Re: State Aid funding for Valley Central School District

Dear Governor Paterson:

Your budget proposal for 2010-2011 will devastate our school district's programs next year. Because of the huge proposed "GAP Elimination Adjustment" (\$3.2 million for Valley Central), and several examples of shifting costs from counties to school districts in this proposal, Valley Central's state aid will decline by over 11% from this year, resulting in a total aid loss of \$3.6 million.

While the district recognizes that New York's finances are in terrible shape, and that reductions need to be distributed across areas of public service, we ask you to recognize and act upon the following flaws in the 2010-2011 State Budget Proposal as it relates to our (and many other) school districts.

1) The formula used to determine a district's GAP Elimination Adjustment is unfair. The formula essentially punishes school districts (like Valley Central) which have held the line on spending and tax rates. Whereas the Valley Central School District's combined wealth ratio is .681 (thus indicating a relatively low wealth ratio), the school district will experience a disproportionately large cut in state aid (11%). The impact of the GAP Elimination Adjustment on a per pupil basis is a whopping \$644 under the proposal. Valley Central will not be able to find public support for a 21% tax increase in order to fund all current programs; our residents are experiencing the same financial stress as residents all over the State.

We are prepared to make reductions but this proposal will cause us to eviscerate the very programs that have improved our student achievement. We ask that the GAP Elimination Adjustment be modified so that aid cuts are calculated on an equitable per-pupil basis.

2) The cap for aid at the January 19, 2010 level is unacceptable. This restriction will further skew aid distribution to damage those districts with higher special education costs since those costs rise as the school year continues. Additionally, BOCES Aid caps will reduce aid for Valley Central based on the current technology infrastructure project. The cap will render much of this activity unaidable. We seek to have this restriction in the proposal removed.

3) While freezing unfunded mandates in December, this Budget includes two new unfunded mandates: additional costs for summer special education programs and new costs for pre-school programs. We seek to have these elements of the proposal removed.

The effect of the current proposal on the Valley Central School District is that there will be a severe erosion of school program. The current level of anticipated staff reductions approaches one hundred. The consequences of the funding reductions include

consideration of the following: closing Maybrook Elementary School, restructuring all elementary schools, reverting from full day kindergarten to half day kindergarten, larger class sizes district-wide, elimination of extra-curricular programs and a large portion of the interscholastic sports program, and the elimination of several student intervention programs which have supported improved graduation rates.

The district is willing to offer a significantly higher level of appropriated fund balance in order to offset a portion of the loss in aid. However the magnitude of the aid cut is so great that the District would be in a financial deficit in two years if the district tried to fund all of the cuts with its own resources. This would be an unacceptable financial plan and could ultimately lead to catastrophic circumstances two years from now.

Your consideration and advocacy for our school district in State budget negotiations is critical to the continued success of our students. We ask for your help.

Sincerely,