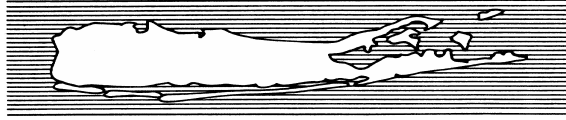


**Nassau Suffolk
School Boards Association, Inc.**



**YEAR 2009
LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM
FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**



On behalf of 112 Long Island school districts, 2.8 million residents and 500,000 students, the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association seeks legislative action that would provide relief for school property taxpayers by:

- ***Committing New York State to pay its fair share of funding its public schools***
- ***Utilizing accurate regional cost and wealth factors in determining aid distribution***
- ***Providing full funding of state and federal mandates***
- ***Imposing no caps that limit the right of a community to determine the expenditure necessary to maintain the educational and fiscal integrity of its school district***
- ***Resisting attempts to shift costs for pre-school special education to local district budgets***



Long Island's reputation for top public schools derives from efforts of boards of education and educators serving a supportive and demanding public; business leaders recognizing economic vitality depends on excellent schools; and state legislators acting in their constituents' interests.

For nearly 20 years of trying economic times, these forces have rallied to protect Long Island's investment in its public schools. They continue to face their greatest challenge....addressing the school funding inequities that force Long Island taxpayers to bear an unfair local tax burden in order to protect their commitment to sustaining high performing public schools, or worse, being robbed, through the imposition of a school tax cap, of the democratic right to determine the balance between what is necessary and what is affordable to maintain the educational and fiscal integrity of their communities' schools.

The Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association has long advocated for the reform of New York's education funding formula. Our positions with regard to school funding are well-established. Long Island, however, continues to realize far less state aid than it is entitled to receive. N-SSBA calls for additional state and federal funding and the restoration of local authority to determine how to best direct funds to meet the needs of the community's children.



SCHOOL FINANCE

It is the joint responsibility of the State and its localities to fund New York's public schools, and the obligation of the federal government to adequately fund federal mandates. To maintain the public's confidence in public education and to address impediments to the efficient utilization of taxpayer funds, the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association recommends the following:

- Increase the state's share of school costs in order to alleviate the inequitable burden placed on local property taxpayers
- Resist attempts to shift costs for pre-school special education to local school district budgets
- Utilize more accurate regional cost and wealth factors in determining a community's ability to pay when formulating all state aid distributions; utilize "median" rather than "average" income and wealth data in determining districts' Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR)
- Impose no mandates that are not fully funded by the state; sunset all existing mandates and reinstate only those that are deemed essential
- Relieve schools of legislative, statutory and regulatory impediments to cost saving strategies and initiatives
- Repeal the costly Wicks Law
- Oppose any reductions in building aid and ensure that federal stimulus monies support new projects
- Exclude increases for health insurance rates, pension contributions, tuition and energy costs from contingency budget cap calculations
- Provide relief from volatile increases in pension contributions and health insurance costs
- Seek greater state funding of special education costs
- Support cost-based funding for children with disabilities by restoring public excess cost aid as an expense-driven aid, and impose no funding caps on those entitled to receive appropriate services
- Eliminate costly duplicative and/or unnecessary reporting by streamlining the state's requirements
- Establish that public funds should support core public education and not be diverted for private school vouchers, tuition tax credits or towards the expansion of services and financial assistance to private, parochial and charter schools
- Distribute state aid equitably to eliminate the disparity between high and low wealth districts by leveling up
- Maintain BOCES, transportation and private excess cost as separate, expense-driven aids
- Remove all caps on the amount of state aid receivable under various formulas, including transportation aid, high-cost special education aid and enrollment growth aid
- Require that all Bills contain a full disclosure of local cost and tax impact

- Hold school districts harmless when properties are removed from the local tax rolls by state and other governmental agencies; expand the use of impact fees for school districts; amend the Real Property Tax Law to permit assessment and taxation of tax-exempt property used for business purposes
- Maintain requirement that Long Island schools be held harmless for back payments of successful assessment challenges
- Fund the STAR program so it is not at the expense of state aid for education; pay STAR reimbursement funds in a manner that eliminates local districts' need to borrow
- Provide timely aid payments in the current year; make no reductions in state aid to education once a state budget is adopted
- Permit school districts to establish reserve funds for TRS and retiree health insurance, recognizing the significant long-term fiscal obligations these items impose
- Permit schools to bundle buildings for electric costs in order to take advantage of the declining rate structure
- Enforce Chapter 287, Laws of 2004, to facilitate Long Island schools' access to NYPA power

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Boards of education are the level of government most directly accountable to the citizens. The right of a community to determine its educational priorities through its locally elected board of education must be respected. To forestall further erosion of local control via federal and state mandates and regulations that assume decision-making authority but not accountability, the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association advocates the following:

- Impose no caps that limit the right of a community to determine the educational opportunities it provides for its students
- Impose no legislation that defies democracy by enabling the minority to control budget votes through a super majority requirement
- Restore to boards the right to determine the number of times a budget may need to be re-aligned and re-submitted to the public for approval, allowing voters to truly participate in the budget building process
- Impose no caps either on the number of students who are entitled to receive special education services or the funding thereof
- Support greater utilization of BOCES services to provide for the needs of component districts
- Allow school districts operating on contingency budgets the ability to determine how best to allocate the scant resources available to preserve the fiscal and educational stability of their schools
- Oppose the requirement that a single high-stakes test be the sole measurement of achievement of the state standards; recognize the validity of multiple measures of assessment and value-added assessment
- Advocate for alternate routes to obtain a Regents diploma

- Amend the Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law, ending requirement to grant automatic step increases beyond expiration of a contract
- Oppose elimination of strike penalties; oppose legislatively mandated or imposed binding arbitration in any form
- Restrict negotiations to mandatory items such as salary, hours, fringe benefits and other conditions that are not in conflict with board or administrative prerogatives
- Restore one-year probationary period for employees who strike
- Replace lifetime tenure with five-year renewable tenure
- Relieve communities of the mandate to turn over local tax dollars to state-imposed, for-profit charter schools that are not locally accountable
- Restore a moratorium on the establishment of new charter schools by the State Education Department and the State University of New York
- Hold charter schools to the same standards and accountability as traditional locally supported public schools and evaluate these schools annually; authorize audits by the state comptroller
- Oppose efforts of county governments to intrude into the governance authority of locally elected boards of education

FEDERAL ISSUES

- Honor Congress' commitment to fully fund its Individual with Disabilities Education Act
- Relieve New York State and local school districts from the costs incurred by the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act by fully funding all NCLB programs as authorized
- Ensure that Federal stimulus monies for education are not used to supplant state obligations
- Maintain Medicaid reimbursements for services
- Address concerns over NCLB assessment and reporting requirements; evaluate assessment tools, particularly as they relate to students with disabilities or those not proficient in English
- Raise pre-existing Title I program appropriations to the level initially envisioned in NCLB; find alternative to use of "free-and-reduced lunch" data to determine qualification
- Restrict NCLB school choice options to locally accountable public schools
- Defeat all attempts to establish private school vouchers, tuition tax credits and the expansion of services and financial assistance to private, parochial and charter schools
- Maintain support for the Federal E-rate program
- Permanently reform the Alternative Minimum Tax to index for inflation and recognize regional wealth differences
- Oppose any changes to the Internal Revenue Code that would eliminate the deductibility of state and local taxes and mortgage interest

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