

**NASSAU-SUFFOLK
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
PRESENTED BY
JIM KADEN, PRESIDENT**

LONGWOOD REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

FEBRUARY 7, 2009

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The Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association thanks the Longwood School District, Eastern Suffolk BOCES and their Boards of Education for sponsoring this annual event.

The presence of the many legislators here this morning is an indication of their interest in hearing the concerns of the educational community in these troubling times.

All in this room are keenly aware of the perils we face in tackling the challenges caused by the global financial meltdown. Troubles emanating from so far away are impacting all levels of government, from the White House to the State House to the school house.

Some view this governmental interconnection as placing public schools at the end of the food chain, in need of endless nourishment and exhausting all resources.

But those familiar with the basics of an eco-system know otherwise.

It is public education that feeds and sustains not only the local environment, but reaches out in all directions to stimulate economic vitality, nurture intellectual growth, innovation and creativity; and ultimately supports a free, democratic society.

Long Islanders have long shown an innate sense that this region's economic vitality depends on excellent schools. For decades they have voted to support their communities' schools, often stepping up to rectify limitations in state funding.

Now, as the federal and state governments struggle to confront the reality of the fiscal crisis, the strategic role public education must play in the nation's economic recovery and long-term stability is becoming increasingly clear.

While the scope of the federal stimulus package is yet to be determined in Senate and House conference committees, a key component is investment in public education. Along with substantial increases in federal funding for Title I and the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the House Bill targets money to states to prevent massive layoffs in school districts.

Given the cutbacks in state funding faced by our region's public schools, the Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association, the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association and SCOPE Educational Services recently commissioned a study that examined the economic role the "education industry" has on the Long Island economy.

The study looks at Governor Paterson's proposed aid cutbacks to this region's schools; cuts that could result in a direct loss of 2,926 school district jobs. With a multiplier effect of a loss of an additional 2,505 support jobs the likely impact on the region's economy could be as much as a negative \$447.2 million !!! This report challenges the presumption that Long Island can withstand the governor's school funding cuts without serious damage being inflicted on our now fragile economy.

Long Island schools are among the best in the country and our costs are on par with schools around New York State when adjusted for regional cost differences; yet our residents are expected to pay 20 percent more of their household incomes for property taxes than all other New Yorkers.

Albany's distorted view of this region's ability to absorb higher taxes means that the "Foundation Formula" established by former Governor Spitzer short-changed Long Island's schools and taxpayers from the onset. Thanks to the efforts of Long Island's Majority Senate Delegation, many of our districts were rescued from being "flat-lined" for the first two years of this multi-year "formula". 2008's school budget approval rate was the result of the High Tax Effort Aid and special education aid they fought for....proof positive that when pressure on the local share of costs is eased, school budgets pass.

Governor Paterson's budget, released in December, perpetuates the delusion that the well on Long Island has not yet run dry and that our schools and taxpayers can be tapped for greater state aid cutbacks than New York City and the rest of the state. As you will learn from Gary Bixhorn's presentation, the Governor's Deficit Reduction Plan cuts Long Island at a rate 42 percent higher than the rest of the state.

Bowing to pressure from County governments, the Governor proposes a shift in pre-school special education costs from the State and Counties onto local school property taxes. Disingenuous, to say the least, given the Governor's and Nassau County Executive's championing of caps on public schools revenues.

And, as to those school property tax caps, their political benefit has just about run its course. It is time to put this sham of a populist initiative to rest. To understand the deception perpetrated on the public, one needs only to look at the estimated zero to 1.7 percent cap that would be imposed on 2010 school budgets. No legislator who continues to support the Suozzi-Paterson school property tax cap deserves the right to be called a friend of public education.

Last year the governor's proposed cuts to Long island were addressed head on by the synergy of our school and business leaders working with Long Island's Senate Delegation. This year, we should heed the advice of Matthew Crosson, President of the Long Island Association, who at our recent conference, called for education, business, labor and political leaders to "circle the wagons" to protect Long island schools and fight for fairness in education funding.

In circling the wagons, however, we will be forced to watch our backs. We can't expect that all on Long Island will be our allies....not the short-sighted tax pacs, not Newsday, not the counties and other levels of government vying for the same dollars. But, we cannot afford to waiver. The duty to stand up for our schools has been entrusted to us.

If we leave with just one impression from this morning's program, it should be that Long Island and its future are in jeopardy if short-sighted decisions made in Albany are allowed to diminish the educational systems our communities have struggled to build and sustain. Our Association renews its commitment to join with you to SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE and SPEAK TO BE HEARD in our advocacy for Long Island and its schools.