

To the Editor:

(re: "School districts plan rally against Mangano tax plan" – quote from County Executive Mangano's spokesperson)

Let's get something straight. Nassau County has never had to cover payments by school districts for assessment challenges when those adjustments were made on time. In fact, in 2002, the County received a 12 month extension on these assessment challenges, increasing the total time to 15 months. Why was that extension granted to Nassau? It was expected that by granting that extension, the assessment roll could be made less vulnerable to potential challenges. All the County had to do was use these 15 months to make timely settlements. If it had, we wouldn't be arguing about the issue of responsibility for the tax certiorari payments now.

What is at issue here is that legal challenges to assessments have been permitted by the County to languish for years and years, accruing high rates of interest, only to eventually be settled anyway.

Faced with the enormity of these accumulated back payments, Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano is now seeking to off-load the County's obligations onto Nassau's school districts. That way, he can make the claim that he has crafted a ~~no~~ property tax increase+ budget.

This is not the first time that Nassau County has tried this little bit of voodoo to make its financial problems disappear. In not one, but two recent court decisions, the County has been told that it has sole legal and financial responsibility for the flaws, errors and delays in its property assessment practices.

School districts play no role whatsoever in the assessment process and never have. Mr. Mangano's new plan would now require each of Nassau's school districts to hire more lawyers and support personnel to defend against any and all assessment challenges. Schools' legal costs will assuredly soar, thereby shifting another County responsibility on to the local school property tax.

Any assertion that abandonment of the County's lawful responsibility will result in ~~no~~ property tax increase+ is false and misleading. The monies the County would keep for itself under this deception would grow exponentially in local property tax impact when transferred to the schools' far narrower revenue base.

Message to Nassau County Legislature: **DON'T ROB THE SCHOOLHOUSE TO FIX YOUR HOUSE!**

Jay L.T. Breakstone, President
Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association