

President's Corner

Governor Paterson's Cuomo-era approach to mid-year state aid cuts foreshadowed what was to be revealed on December 16th with the release of his 2009 budget.

History was repeated.

While never fully recovering from the cutbacks of the 1990's, Long Island schools are again being targeted to subsidize the state's shortfalls.

Unfortunately. Unfairly. Unconscionably.

You know the numbers: Long Island educates 17% of the state's public school children, but receives only 12.5% of the state aid. Despite the existing gross imbalance, the governor proposes to slash our share **by 23.1%**, which is 73% higher than the cut to New York City's schools and 40% higher than the rest of the state.

It may be admirable that the governor has chosen to maintain Foundation Aid, but seemingly less so when he fails to seek corrections to the formula that would provide equitable funding for all regions of the state. The majority of Long Island school districts are ill-served by a formula that does not recognize the extraordinary property tax burden carried by our taxpayers and the cost of doing business in the region. His cuts will hit our low to middle income communities the hardest. Districts that can least afford to compromise their academic programs will have little choice but to raise taxes and cut program.

The governor's unrealistic "mandate relief" is miniscule and far from implementation. He ignores the most significant suggestions put forth by the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA). Aside from the welcomed, but temporary exemption from the Wicks Law, he offers few reductions in the mandates that actually drive up costs, nor do his "efficiencies" even begin to offset the millions of dollars in lost revenues. He will force districts to precipitously apply reserve funds to supplant state aid shortfalls. Conversely, he simultaneously balks at tapping into the state's own "rainy day fund."

Perhaps it is his misconception that administrative costs comprise 71% of school budgets that leads him to believe millions of dollars can be absorbed without impacting the classroom.

There is no question that the state is faced with critical deficits and that we are confronting excruciating decisions about our programs and the future of Long Island students. However, I am not willing to carry the weight of the crisis on the backs of Long Island taxpayers and school children.

Quality public schools and a well-educated populace are the fuel that drives New York's economic engine. Short-changing education will have wide-spread, long-term repercussions, impeding economic recovery.

N-SSBA has been proactive in working with officials in both counties, the state, and with other educational organizations, on initiatives to garner efficiencies in school operations. Indeed, if "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste," perhaps we can seize this opportunity to overcome bipartisan politics and tabloid rhetoric to provide real cost savings and limit the impact of a failing economy on our schools.

I urge you to join us on January 27 as we confront this crisis together.



Register Today!

Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association
Nassau County Council of School Superintendents
Suffolk County School Superintendents Association
Present a Joint Conference for

School Board Members, Superintendents,
and Business Officials

SURVIVOR: Long Island - Confronting and Managing Financial Challenges

Keynote speaker

MATTHEW CROSSON

President, Long Island Association

A three-part conference:

1. Public Schools & the LI Economy
2. A Crisis Is a Terrible Thing to Waste - Strategies for Surviving the Tough Times Ahead
3. Lessons Learned: Why the Early 90's Are so Important (or Deja Vu All Over Again)

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2009

Hilton Long Island/Huntington
Melville

Registration & Buffet Dinner: 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Program: 7:30 – 10:00 p.m.

N-SSBA on the Move

Your interests were represented at the following events since early November:

- ◆ Long Island Education Coalition (LIEC) meeting in November, chaired by N-SSBA liaison **Judith Chen**, hosted Regent Roger Tilles. In attendance were **Mary Jo O'Hagan**, **Lorraine Deller** and **Myra Vaughn** for N-SSBA; **Lana Ajemian** for Nassau Region PTA.
- ◆ LIEC meeting in December with Matthew Crosson, President of the Long Island Association (LIA), for a discussion of the governor's proposed budget and drafting of a joint statement to respond to its impact on Long Island. In attendance were N-SSBA liaison and chairperson **Judith Chen**, **Mary Jo O'Hagan**, **Lorraine Deller** and **Myra Vaughn** for N-SSBA; **Lana Ajemian** for Nassau Region PTA.
- ◆ LIA breakfast meeting with a one-on-one interview of Gov. David Paterson by LIA President Crosson. In attendance were Executive Committee members **Jim Kaden**, **Jay Breakstone**, **Mary Jo O'Hagan**, **Maryanne Lehrer** and **Jim March**; **Lorraine Deller** and **Myra Vaughn** for N-SSBA; **Lana Ajemian** for NYSPTA; and **Susan Bergtraum** and **Fred Langstaff** for NYSSBA.
- ◆ Assemblyman Marc Alessi's Budget Task Force to provide suggestions to for cutting the NYS Budget prior to Nov. 15.
- ◆ NYSSBA Fiscal Oversight for School Board Members for School Board Members by **Lorraine Deller**.
- ◆ State Aid Data Analysis after the release of the governor's budget by **Lorraine Deller**.
- ◆ WLIV/ITV by liaison **Maryanne Lehrer**.

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LORRAINE DELLER, Executive Director

David Little Urges Board Action in Confronting the Challenges Ahead

“Our hope lies in locally elected boards of education.”

- David Little, NYSSBA Director of Governmental Relations

The situation in Albany is “volatile and dire,” David Little, Director of the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) warned the 150 school board members and superintendents at N-SSBA’s Semi-Annual Dinner in December.

And that was the good news.

The fiscal crisis is not the only challenge facing school boards.

Public officials are compromising trust in boards of education and public education, state revenues are declining, businesses, including Wall St., have the ability to operate anywhere outside New York, and people are leaving the state.

“If the ‘Empire State’ is to have meaning, we need to do one thing better than anyone else...education.” He noted that when urban results are removed from testing data, “no one in the world does it better than New York,” but there is a cost to the failures of the cities as unproductive citizens strain limited resources.

With public schools threatened by a tax cap, potential changes in the community vote and the governor’s budget, “all we can do “is bleed to death,” he said.

Mr. Little voiced concern for the federal environment, including the NCLB. “We’re now in the ‘bad’ years when really ugly and costly things happen.” He was not optimistic that changes in NCLB would be a priority of the new administration and noted that two-thirds of New York State Education Department staff is now tied to federal programs, despite the lack of federal funding.

While we are facing the most significant challenges as advocates for public education, Mr. Little declared that school boards are uniquely qualified to address them. “The most important job of board members will be to hold meetings, make phone calls and write letters to save public education as an entity,” he said. Mr. Little implored board members to act, urging attendance at NYSSBA’s State Issues Conference in downtown Albany, March 1-3. For the first time, there is no cost for attendance.

In reaction to being under siege, “it’s got to be public education vs. everyone else,” he said.

What is the Heroin Notification Legislation All About?

During the month of December, your Association addressed well-intended legislation by both county legislatures to require police departments to notify school officials of an arrest for the sale or possession of heroin in their district, or the arrest of a district resident somewhere else in the county.

N-SSBA questioned the effectiveness of legislation, raised concern with the liability it created for districts, and brought attention to the counties’ overstepping their authority by imposing an unfunded mandate on school districts

School districts are legal entities unto themselves. Public education is a “larger state interest” and exempt from Home Rule provisions of the Constitution. In other words, counties can not dictate to school districts.

Jay L.T. Breakstone testified before the Nassau County Legislature on two occasions. He was successful in having the bill tabled for review by the County Attorney after raising questions about school districts’ liability and reminding legislators that “all members of the community share the moral responsibility for raising its children.” At the Dec. 15 meeting, the amended bill included N-SSBA’s suggestion to broaden notification by creating a website of heroin activity.

In Suffolk County, Legislator Wayne Horsley invited N-SSBA to work with him to create better legislation that addressed N-SSBA’s concerns following testimony by **Lorraine Deller, Myra Vaughn** and **Area 12 Director Fred Langstaff**. They met with Leg. Horsley, who agreed to eliminate school notification in favor of a creating a website of heroin activity available to community organizations and the public at large. The site will include specific information about arrests.

The Suffolk County Legislature passed the amended bill and invited N-SSBA to a press conference. **Jim Kaden, Lorraine Deller, Myra Vaughn** and **Fred Langstaff** attended.

A concerted effort by your Association improved legislation that will be far more effective in broadening public awareness of heroin activity in an effort to protect the region’s youth. However, the liability and governance issues remain in the Nassau County law.

!!!!CHANGE OF DATE!!!!

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2009
WOODBURY COUNTRY CLUB

Advocacy Efforts on Behalf Of N-SSBA

- ◆ Testified in December at the New York State Senate Democrats “Budget Issues in Health, Education Higher Education and Social Services,” at Brookhaven Town Hall, one of three public hearings statewide. **Lorraine Deller** addressed the Senators, saying that Foundation Aid has not served the majority of Long Island, resulting in the dependence on special High Tax Aid. Her testimony highlighted opposition to the property tax cap, the need for mandate relief, state efforts to increase federal funding for I.D.E.A., N-SSBA’s efforts to expand shared services, support for the state to take responsibility for funding charter schools, and incentive aid to assist exploration of school district consolidation. Also in attendance were **Susan Bergtraum** and **Fred Langstaff**, who testified on behalf of NYSSBA; **Myra Vaughn** for N-SSBA, and **Lana Ajemian** for NYSPTA.
- ◆ Responded with a letter to Newsday for their criticism of the Association for its stance on the Heroin Notification legislation (published December 11, 2008).
- ◆ Responded to an editorial in Newsday criticizing special interest groups for their reaction to the governor’s budget with a letter to the editor published January 5, 2009.
- ◆ Testified before the Nassau and Suffolk County Legislators on the Heroin Notification legislation; worked with Suffolk County Legislator Horsley to create effective legislation. (See related article). Sought opinions from NYSSBA Counsel in preparation of testimony.
- ◆ Wrote letters to Long Island’s state delegation in opposition to Gov. Paterson’s mid-year cuts.
- ◆ Wrote to Sen. Dean Skelos, thanking him for his efforts to thwart the mid-year cut and sharing with him NYSSBA’s *Report of the Task Force on Maximizing School District Resources*.
- ◆ Reached out to the Nassau County Boards of Education in support of a grant application 21st Century Demonstration Project Grant, a competitive grant available via New York State’s Local Government Efficiency Program. The sum requested will be \$1 million, with Nassau BOCES serving as the lead agency. The focus of this grant to explore shared services in IT/Telecom, audit services, non-public transportation and purchasing.

DATES TO REMEMBER

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
Jan. 15	N-SSBA Executive Committee Meeting	Western Suffolk BOCES/7:30 PM
Jan. 22	NYSSBA Conference, <i>Fiscal Management in Hard Financial Times</i> Suffolk Region PTA Presidents/Principals Dinner	Islandia Marriott/8:45 AM—3:30 PM Marriott Windwatch/Islandia
Jan. 27	N-SSBA/NCCSS/SCSSA Conference	Hilton LI/Huntington (Melville)/7:30—10 PM
Feb. 1-3	NSBA Federal Relations Network	Washington, DC
Feb. 5	N-SSBA Legislation Committee Meeting	Western Suffolk BOCES/7:30 PM