

ASSEMBLYWOMAN

Addie Russell

Education Update: Winter 2013

Dulles State Office Building, Suite 210
317 Washington St., Watertown, NY 13601

Assemblywoman Russell: Pass the School Funding Equity Act now!

For years, it has been clear we need to change the way our schools are funded. That's why Assemblywoman Russell authored the School Funding Equity Act (A.4609), which reforms the school aid formula to provide a more fair distribution of resources throughout the state. These reforms would have the greatest benefit for schools in both rural and urban areas. In 2014, Assemblywoman Russell will continue fighting for the School Funding Equity Act, making it one of her top priorities for the next legislative session.

Specifically, the School Funding Equity Act would:

- allow for aid to be calculated based on a school's most favorable data within the last five years;
- provide an accurate calculation of the average cost of general education instruction;
- place more emphasis on the number of students that qualify for free and reduced school lunches;
- eliminate the requirement that all school districts receive a minimum amount of school aid;
- call for the regional cost index to be updated to reflect current data;
- address arbitrary provisions in the funding formula that prevent the poorest schools from being compensated based upon their actual data; and
- eliminate automatic increases in aid to school districts that do not need those funds as indicated by the formula and reclaim those excess funds.



Some progress has already been made on school funding. In the 2012-13 budget, automatic increases were reduced from 3 percent to 0.6 percent, and in the 2013-14 budget, the .65 percent arbitrary floor in the funding formula that prevents the poorest schools from being compensated based upon their actual data floor was eliminated completely.

For many, school funding reform continues to be a divisive issue. Assemblywoman Russell's approach is to build support among a broad base of stakeholders for the School Funding Equity Act. Reforming the school aid formula is a critical first step toward stabilizing our school districts' finances and achieving the equitable distribution of state education dollars.

Making smart investments in education



Assemblywoman Russell helped pass this year's state budget, a step in the right direction for school funding, which provided a \$936.6 million increase over the 2012-13 school year. But, even more can be accomplished. In next year's budget, Assemblywoman Russell will work to include \$1.9 billion in additional school aid to take the burden off local property taxpayers as follows:

- \$1 billion in additional classroom operating aid to be distributed based on the foundation aid formula;
- \$300 million to restore programmatic cuts that have narrowed the curriculum and make improvements that prepare students for college and careers;
- \$250 million in expense-based aids (transportation, BOCES, high-cost special education, hardware, software and textbooks, etc.) and Building Aid;
- \$225 million for the first phase of universal full-day pre-K, expanding Governor Cuomo's commitment to universal, high-quality pre-K for all 4-year-olds;
- \$110 million for college-ready community schools; and
- \$20 million for supports and interventions to build a positive school climate.

"There is little question that our schools have been struggling in this tough economy," said Assemblywoman Russell. "These increases to education funding are a step in the right direction, making it possible for our schools to rebuild and provide the education our children need and deserve. In the coming year, I will continue to work hard to ensure North Country schools receive the funding and support they need."

The FACTS on New York State's educational system

- New York State ranks an abysmal 44th among the states when it comes to educational funding equity.
- New York's 100 wealthiest schools spend \$8,601 more per student than the 100 poorest school districts.
- New York State has \$5.5 billion in funding arrears owed to local schools based upon the 2007 Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit settlement agreement.

Join Assemblywoman Russell for a rally with the Alliance for Quality Education

Assemblywoman Russell will host a rally with the Alliance for Quality Education on

Jan. 9, 2014

6:30 p.m.

Massena, NY (Location TBD)

Join her to demand **no more excuses** when it comes to our children's education.

Ensuring Common Core works for students and educators

While the intent of Common Core is laudable, there are significant concerns about the rollout of the new standards, as well as the tests and evaluations associated with them. Assemblywoman Russell understands these concerns and believes the state should retain ownership of its curriculum. She believes that corporations should not be receiving taxpayer dollars for poorly designed and flawed programs and materials. That's why she is calling for a moratorium



on high-stakes testing and consequences for students, teachers and schools until there is adequate time to gain an understanding and familiarity with the new material, to address problems in the new curriculum, and to put the state back in control of its academic curriculum.

Further, Assemblywoman Russell supports a ban on all standardized testing for pre-K through second grade. In these early grades, the focus should be on learning through developmentally appropriate

methods, rather than subjecting young children to testing. In combination with a reduction in standardized testing across all grade levels, these changes will allow teachers to focus on developing students' skills and understandings, rather than simply refining their ability to take tests. Additionally, students with disabilities and language barriers should not be forced to take developmentally inappropriate tests.

"As a mother, I know that each child is special and no two children learn in precisely the same way," Assemblywoman Russell said. "It is becoming clear that many of the demands placed on our children are excessive and counterproductive. The problems with the implementation of Common Core cannot be ignored. I will work to find ways to give our teachers and schools the resources necessary to allow our children to succeed."

Assemblywoman Russell wants to hear from you!

As we move forward with adjusting our standards and curriculum, Assemblywoman Russell wants your input. Please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire about your views on educational issues facing our state.



Clip and return to:

Assemblywoman Addie J. Russell, Dulles State Office Building, Suite 210, 317 Washington St., Watertown, NY 13601

Do you believe past education standards were high enough? YES NO

Do you think the new Common Core standards have been rushed? YES NO

Do you think students' personal data should be stored on a website? YES NO

Do you feel there are too many high-stakes tests in New York schools? YES NO

Do you believe the state should offer students the option of a career track as well as an educational track? YES NO

Do you support school mergers to increase the quality of educational programs? YES NO

Comments:

Deadline is Dec. 31 for Basic STAR exemption

In an effort to save taxpayers \$50 million, homeowners currently receiving a Basic STAR exemption must verify their eligibility by completing a one-time re-registration process.

- Homeowners should have received a letter from the NYS Tax Department with a personalized code and instructions on how to re-register.
- You can register at www.tax.ny.gov or by calling the Tax Department at 518-457-2036.
- Beware of scams and don't give your information to any solicitor offering a fee-based re-registration service. This process is quick and easy and – most important – free of cost to you.



ASSEMBLYWOMAN

Addie Russell

Reports to the people of the 116th Assembly District

Do you have a question or concern?

Assemblywoman Addie J. Russell wants to hear from you.

You can contact us at either of our district offices, by email or telephone.

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