

News from Assemblyman George Amedore

Albany Office: 718 Legislative Office Building • Albany, NY 12248 • (518) 455-5197
District Office: 1170 Riverfront Center • Amsterdam, NY 12010 • (518) 843-0227



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: 518-694-1955

March 14, 2011

CUOMO, LEGISLATIVE LEADERS MUST ADDRESS INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION AID

Legislative Column from Assemblyman George Amedore (R,C,I – Rotterdam)

As we tackle the many fiscal challenges associated with the 2011-12 State Budget, many issues have come to light; one of the most harmful is the inequity found in cuts in education aid allotted to Upstate New York school districts. As it currently stands, students in Schenectady and Montgomery counties face a perilous future, as the current cut puts them at a tremendous disadvantage and seriously jeopardizes our schools and teachers. This could bring hardship for the already overburdened taxpayer who cannot sustain the resulting increases in their property taxes.

The proposed cuts and statistics regarding its outcome show conclusively that Upstate New York districts face a sizeable disadvantage when compared to wealthier districts in the Westchester, New York City and Long Island regions. Upstate New York educates roughly 45 percent of the student population in the state, and according to the proposed budget cuts, is receiving 52 percent of the total education cuts statewide. The current formula rewards school districts that have spent generously on programs, amenities, personnel and administrators through unconscionably high property taxes approved by voters. As a result, they receive “High Tax Aid” to supplement their spending habits. Our upstate schools are struggling to provide basic materials and programs, while others spend lavishly – this cannot continue.

While I do not disparage communities for their economic success, we must recognize that some parts of the state have a greater ability and opportunity to fund their schools with relative ease, but others do not. Downstate districts have larger tax bases that can absorb cuts and state aid makes up a small percentage of their entire budget, while upstate school districts rely much more heavily on state aid as a percent of their annual budgets. Our local tax base cannot absorb these dramatic cuts like downstate districts, especially considering the potential for a twenty to forty percent increase in property taxes.

Clearly, residents of the 105th Assembly district cannot afford these astronomical tax increases, especially when we are already seeing citizens taxed out of their homes. Without major changes in the distribution of state aid to our local districts, the results could be disastrous: superintendents will be forced to let teachers go, cut vital programs, deplete cash reserves and eventually look to close schools. School districts in Schenectady and Montgomery counties have some of the lowest per-pupil expenditures

-MORE-

in the state, having spent the past several years finding new efficiencies while offering the best possible education. We must honor their due diligence by doing no harm, not giving greater punishment.

Since being elected, I have often witnessed geographic discrimination associated with the needs of Upstate New York. It is no secret that the Legislature consists of more downstate representatives who throw their weight around Albany. Education funding discrepancies are the most glaring example I have seen to date, which shows the great divide between upstate and downstate representation. I refuse to vote for any budget that does not address these inequities and strongly urge legislative leaders to address the undeniable fact that upstate schools are headed down a path of destruction.

Many superintendents, educators, board members, and organizations have taken their time to express their concerns and are in unanimous agreement that these disparities will bring long-term pain to our communities. While much more can still be done to bring down additional costs in our own schools in the long-term such as unfunded mandates, employee pensions, and healthcare costs, it is imperative that state funds be prioritized and immediately allocated to schools that are at the most risk.

###