

# CLARENCE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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February 25, 2020

The Honorable Michael Ranzenhofer

New York State Senate

8203 Main Street Suite 4

Williamsville, NY 14221

Dear Senator Ranzenhofer,

Thank you for your continued support of the Clarence Central School District. My purpose in writing to you is to respectfully ask for your assistance in responding legislatively to the proposals for School Aid in Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget for 2020-21.

First and foremost, Governor Cuomo's recommended increase in School Aid is inadequate. This year, the Governor proposed a \$826 million increase in traditional formula-based school aid, consisting of Foundation Aid and a new consolidation of expense-based aids. These funding streams are the ones that school districts depend on most. \$504 million of that total is an increase in actual Foundation Aid. In Clarence, the Foundation Aid increase is \$39,575 which translates to 0.25 percent, or approximately \$8 per student, the lowest possible percentage increase. School aid in the Governor's budget falls short of estimates by the Educational Conference Board that \$1.6 billion is needed just to enable schools to preserve current programs. The Governor recommends \$51 million in aid for special programs, which have merit but should only be funded after adequate Foundation and expense-based aids are provided.

Second, the Governor proposes folding 10 aid categories, including BOCES, textbook, and hardware and software aid into Foundation Aid. The proposal needs to be immediately rejected by the Legislature. Folding traditional expense-based aids into Foundation Aid would erode predictability in school district financial planning, diminish direct support for career and technical education, and threaten the viability of BOCES.

Third, the Governor proposes major changes to Building Aid, Transportation Aid, and funding special education placements. The proposed changes would impose more costs for school districts to absorb within the property tax cap. The proposed Building Aid changes would make it impossible for district leaders to make or keep promises to their communities on the actual local share of future capital projects. The proposed cap on Transportation Aid would not match the real cost of transporting all children, including homeless children, private school children and students with disabilities. Transportation costs continue to escalate given tight labor markets and shortages in bus drivers.

Fourth, the Governor's budget proposal does not consider common sense changes to the now permanent tax cap, such as adjustments to the carry over provision, pension exclusion, and impact of PILOTs on property tax base growth factors. The Property Tax Cap is both popular politically and it serves as a check on school district spending. It has also rendered it impossible for school districts to put forward a budget that exceeds the cap as a means of increasing revenue. School districts are more dependent on the state than ever before to provide adequate funding in order to maintain programs. The eleven-year average tax levy increase in Clarence has been less than two percent, far lower than the cost of living increases over the same period. Without adequate school aid from the state, program cuts will need to be considered. This will marginalize a great school district and a tremendous community asset. We need your help to make things right.

I urge you to please consider amending the 2019 law allowing employees three hours off to vote. The Legislature must amend the law to restore the prior exclusion for employees who have at least four hours to vote before or after their work shift. It is completely unnecessary for teachers, bus drivers, and other school employees to have time off to vote when they can do so easily before or after work.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 407-9102 if you need further input or information.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey M. Hicks, Ed.D.

Superintendent