

CLARENCE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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February 5, 2018

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 2018-19.

First and foremost, Governor Cuomo's recommended increase in School Aid is inadequate. The Educational Conference Board, a broad coalition of the state's major educational organizations, estimated that an increase of \$1.5 billion would be necessary to keep schools operating at last year's level. The Board of Regents requested \$1.25 billion to adequately fund school districts. The Executive Budget increase to Foundation Aid is less than half of both those proposals. In Clarence, the Foundation Aid increase is \$34,853, which translates to 0.25%, or approximately \$8 per student, the lowest possible percentage increase. The bottom line is that a much larger increase in School Aid is needed.

Second, the Governor proposes placing a cap on expense-based aids in 2019-20. The cap for transportation and BOCES aid would be two percent per district, while the proposed cap on building aid would be two percent statewide. The Executive's proposal argues that the "savings" generated by this cap could then be used to increase other aid categories, including Foundation Aid. However, the proposal includes no guarantees to do so and would not lead to an increase in overall school aid, but simply a redistribution of funding that would already be provided to school districts. In addition, the proposal could drastically affect the funding of school district construction projects, including those that have already been approved by voters and, the incentive that currently exists for school districts to share services through BOCES. The proposed cap on expense-based aids is highly problematic and the most negatively impactful element of the Governor's Budget. It should be rejected outright.

Third, the Governor's proposed budget places at least \$50 million of School Aid to grant programs, such as early college high schools, advance placement waivers, after school programs, computer science, and breakfast programs. While each of these proposals have merit, it is imprudent to allocate scarce resources to new items before fully funding Foundation Aid. In addition, the Governor proposes shifting \$70 million in special education costs back to districts.

Fourth, the Governor proposes budget contingencies for potential appropriation decreases in case of smaller federal Medicaid funding and lower than anticipated sales tax receipts. His plan would require the legislature to develop plans to cut appropriations possibly resulting in mid-year reductions to school aid. School district budgets are voted on by citizens in anticipation of revenue from the state. Mid-year cuts in school aid would have a profoundly negative impact on the education of students.

The advent of the Property Tax Cap has rendered it impossible for school districts to put forward a budget that exceeds the cap as a means of gaining revenue. School districts are more dependent on the state than ever before to provide adequate funding in order to maintain programs. In Clarence, we had to make some program reductions over the past seven years to balance budgets and stay within the tax cap. The nine-year average tax levy increase in Clarence has been 1.9%, far lower than the cost of living increases over the same period. Any further program cuts will marginalize a great school district and a tremendous community asset. We need your help to make things right.

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