

CLARENCE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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February 17, 2017

The Honorable Michael Norris

144th Assembly District

LOB 718

Albany, NY 12248

Dear Assemblyman Norris,

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 2017-18.

First and foremost, Governor Cuomo's recommended increase in School Aid is inadequate, and not close to the increases deemed necessary to keep school districts financially solvent. The Educational Conference Board, a broad coalition of the state's major educational organizations, estimated that an increase of \$1.7 billion would be necessary to keep schools operating at last year's level. The Board of Regents requested \$2.1 billion to adequately fund school districts. Without considering building aid, the Executive Budget increase for the Clarence Central School District is 1.4%, leaving a year over year budget gap of over \$800,000 given the tax levy cap for 2017-18. The bottom line is that a much larger increase in School Aid is needed.

Second, the Governor's proposal would essentially repeal the existing Foundation Aid formula and leave districts with no basis for forecasting possible future aid. The state is now over \$4 billion behind in phasing-in the Foundation Aid formula, which drove the greatest aid per pupil to the neediest districts and promised all districts more predictability in aid going forward. The Foundation Aid formula uses components to determine aid amounts that have a factual basis, making state funding more transparent and decision-makers more accountable. I strongly urge you to reject the Governor's repeal of the Foundation Aid formula.

Third, the Governor's proposed budget places \$239 million of School Aid to an undetermined "fiscal stabilization fund" and new programs such as, early college high schools, after-school programs, AP fee waivers, and awards to teachers. While each of the programs have merit, it is irresponsible to allocate scarce resources to new items before fully funding Foundation Aid.

Fourth, the Governor proposes authorizing the Division of Budget to reduce school aid, and other appropriations, if federal aid, or other receipts, are less than budgeted. The proposal would essentially divest the Legislature of its budgeting authority. The proper and appropriate action if state and federal receipts are less than anticipated would be to call a special session of the Legislature and enact a deficit reduction action. This proposal should be rejected outright.

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 have cut \$7.2 million and over 100 positions over the past six 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 or rate of inflation. 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