



NYS Budget Forum: Friday, February 3rd

The Westchester Delegation of the NYS Legislature will hold a public forum on Governor Cuomo's proposed NYS 2017-2018 budget on Friday, February 3rd from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm at the Greenburgh Public Library at 300 Tarrytown Road, Elmsford, NY.

The PTSA Legislative Strategic Advisory Committee has submitted a letter to the Westchester Delegation on the budget and public school funding, highlighting foundation aid and tax cap reform.

Members of the LSA Committee plan to attend Friday's meeting and, if invited to speak, their comments will focus on the issues raised in the letter:

Irvington, NY
January 31, 2017

To the Members of the NYS Assembly Westchester Delegation:

We, the Irvington PTSA Legislative Strategic Advisory Committee, would like to share our concerns regarding Governor Cuomo's budget plan for the 2017-18 school year. With the combination of Governor Cuomo's pullback from the court-ordered provision of foundation aid, and the tax cap levy growth rate for schools coming in at less than one percent for 2017-18, this budget will fail to provide public schools with the full \$2.1 billion recommended by the Board of Regents. Instead, statewide, it will provide less than HALF of that at approximately \$1 billion. By providing insufficient funding, this budget is setting up school districts to fail our children. We see two ways to improve this situation.

First, we would like your help in convincing the governor to retain foundation aid and to allow it to properly provide for decreases in local spending capacity, local growth in immigrant populations with English Language Learner needs, local increases in registrations of students with disabilities, and a rise in the number of students living in poverty. The State cannot continue to mandate that districts spend more to educate our ELL and disabled students, then fail to fund those requirements.

Focusing on Irvington, for example, we have seen the number of our students qualifying for free and reduced school lunch increase from 3% to 9% in approximately five years, but our Foundation Aid allotment does not reflect that increase. Moreover, for Westchester generally, the foundation aid calculation fails to take into account the interaction of Westchester County's higher median income with the higher cost of living in this area. Nor does the allotment take into

account our local increases in the number of ELL students and disabled students who are required to receive additional services under state and federal law. There are fixed costs associated with complying with even small changes in the numbers of students needing these services that affect small districts like ours disproportionately.

The second way to help begin to alleviate the unsustainable budget situation our Westchester districts are experiencing is a reform of the state's touted "Two Percent" tax cap which is not a consistent 2%. The facts show that our schools in any given year may not be allowed to expand their budgets at all, let alone to an amount equal to 2%. Last year for example, due to the historic decrease in the price of oil, the calculation of the cap (pegged to the CPI and inflation) required that Irvington work within a tax cap levy of below zero (-.07%), requiring us to cut an already lean budget. This year, under the flawed formula which is again under 2%, we will be required to cut more than \$300,000 from our budget due to this year's tax cap calculation -- again under 2% -- under the flawed formula. Why should public education depend upon such an utterly unpredictable funding algorithm? Governor Cuomo is rightly proud that the state budget hews to a predictable 2.2% growth. Why should our school districts and children then be forced to contend with less predictability?

It is essential that the tax cap rely on a true baseline of 2%; the allowable growth factor should be consistent and positive every year. We need you, our Westchester delegation, to also make sure that a revised tax cap formula includes the following:

- BOCES capital cost toward capital exclusion
- non-profit properties within the tax base growth factor
- allowance for all school districts of an amount of growth no lower than that of the previous year
- enrollment growth AND business growth
- redesigned school budget ballots requiring simple majority approval

In summary, insufficient foundation aid is problematic, but the current tax cap algorithm leaves us unable to plan ahead and unable to fill in the gaps by readily raising funds from local taxpayers when necessary. We want the ability to plan for the future without shifting promises about foundation aid and the flawed and limiting calculation of the tax levy cap. We need and deserve greater funding predictability for our communities and our children to thrive.

Sincerely,

Irvington PTSA Legislative Strategic Advisory Committee
Beth Propper, Vice President
Elissa Strauss, Deb Fuchs, Co-Chairs
Maura Gedid, Tanya Hunt, Allison Waguespack, Members