

February 25, 2015

The Honorable Assemblyman Michael Kearns
Democrat, 142nd District
Legislative Office Building Rm 431
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Assemblyman Kearns:

As a parent in the West Seneca Central School District, I am very concerned about the future of state aid for the school district.

In the recent State of the State address on January 21, 2015, the Governor indicated that he would increase spending on education by 1.7 percent, or \$377 million. The Governor also suggested increasing the budget for education to 4.8 percent, if the legislature passes his specific education reform agenda.

These proposals are a concern because they do not address the significant impact of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). The GEA was deducted from each school district's state aid allocation to help the State deal with its revenue shortfall during the 2009-10 school year. In subsequent years, state leaders continued the GEA to ease the State's deficit at the expense of local school districts. For the next several years, school districts faced frozen and/or reduced state aid allocations, decreased further by the annual GEA cut. Since the GEA's inception, our district has lost approximately \$35,000,000 in state aid.

To make matters worse, by the end of the 2011-12 school year, supplemental federal funding was no longer available, meaning that our school district could not use federal ARRA funding or the 2010 Educational Jobs Fund to mitigate the state aid loss.

In 2011, NYS enacted the tax levy limit (popularly known as the property tax cap). By doing this, the state also limited our districts' ability to raise local revenue. Since state aid and local property taxes are the primary sources of revenue for school districts, our district has been forced to make difficult choices to balance the budget with reduced revenue.

West Seneca has spent down its fund balance in an effort to mitigate the loss of state aid. By doing so, the District has been able to sustain a high quality education program for all of our students. However, as the District spent down its fund balance, it was also limited in the amount of local tax that could be raised to support our educational program. As the District can only collect up to the limitations imposed by the tax cap, and the Governor's state aid proposal is set at 1.7%, we are highly concerned that the quality educational program that we have been accustomed to in West Seneca will face severe cuts due to the projected budget gap we are now facing.

We are asking for your help in persuading the Governor to increase state aid for all school districts above 5% without conforming to his specific reform agenda. We are also asking that the legislature abolish the entire gap elimination adjustment by returning those dollars to our school district. This would allow districts to better meet the needs of students, and associated unfunded state mandates, and still operate within the financial restrictions previously enacted and mentioned above. As NYS now enjoys a budget surplus, it is no longer necessary to continue the Gap Elimination to remedy a previous NYS budget deficit.

We are very proud of the educational program that is provided and we are fortunate to live in West Seneca. Please help us avoid the severe cuts to our education program that will be necessary if the current state aid projections are not modified in a significant way.

Sincerely