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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Long Island Delegation to the New York State Senate
Members of the Long Island Delegation to the New York State Assembly
Long Island Education Coalition Member Organizations

FROM: Roberta A. Gerold, SCSSA President
David S. Feller, NCCSS President

DATE: October 30, 2013

RE: **How Do You Spell Relief? Eliminate the G-E-A!**

The Suffolk County School Superintendents Association and the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents have a very simple message this year – **Eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA)**. The GEA is a formula that was introduced to withhold state aid from schools. Over the last three years it has cost Long Island schools districts nearly \$1 billion. This has occurred while demands on our schools continue to grow. Changing regional demographics, a weakened local economy, and the implementation of an array of expensive State Education Department initiatives have driven much of this growth.

The SCSSA and NCCSS have made eliminating the GEA our top legislative priority for this year. The state should stop withholding aid pursuant to the GEA in 2014-15 while fully funding all existing formulas. Then in 2015-16, the entire state aid system should be scrapped and finally replaced with one that works.

Attached is a brochure that describes our proposal and details the impact of the GEA on every Long Island school district. We are also forwarding two recent columns written by SCSSA Legislative Chairperson Gary D. Bixhorn. The first, from *Newsday* (9/9/13), describes the changing demographics and economics of Long Island schools, and the second, from the *Long Island Business News* (9/13/13), describes the impact of the GEA.

Our organizations appreciate your attention to this information. We will be working to gain your support for our legislative initiative as preparation of the 2014-15 state aid package progresses.

Thank you for your attention to this important initiative.

RAG/DSF/df
Attachments

Bixhorn: Long Island's senior class lives in a different world

Originally published: September 6, 2013 5:01 PM; Updated: September 6, 2013 8:53 PM

The public school senior class of 2014 is finishing its education in schools that are more diverse than when it started kindergarten in the 2001. At the same time, Long Island communities are far less wealthy than they were.

The Long Island high school Class of 2014 has returned to school. For the majority, graduation will be the culmination of a 13-year public school experience that began in kindergarten classrooms in September 2001. While the school buildings that these students attend look very much the same as when they started, the characteristics and demographics of the students in those buildings have changed significantly.

Long Island schools are far more diverse than in the 2001-02 school year. At the same time, our communities are far less wealthy than they were. In 2001-02, the average income of Long Islanders was 40 percent greater than the state average. The difference has now dropped to just 13 percent, according to a New York State Council of School Superintendents analysis of State Education Department data. The total number of students in Long Island public schools has fallen by about 14,000 in that period to around 441,000. But the number of children living in poverty increased by 6,000 to 42,000 students, and now represents nearly 10 percent of the region's enrollment.

We know that the socioeconomic status of students is a major indicator of educational need. So the data indicate we have a student population requiring a far more intense level of service than just a few years ago.

Aside from the economic changes, there have been shifts in race and ethnicity. Both counties saw their combined proportion of white and African-American students drop from more than 80 percent to around 70 percent over the period. In Suffolk County, there has been a dramatic rise in the proportion of Latino students, from 12 percent in 2001 to 21 percent in 2012. In Nassau County, the Latino population grew from 12 percent to 18 percent. In Nassau, currently 11 percent of the students are Asian-American, compared with 4 percent in Suffolk.

The impact of these changes has been widespread. They are accompanied by an increase in the number of students in our schools who first learned to speak a language other than English -- known as "English language learners." That population stands at nearly 29,000 -- 6.5 percent of the region's enrollment. In 2001, it was 4.3 percent. These students come to school speaking more than 70 different languages, with 80 percent speaking Spanish.

So, what has this meant for our schools?

Clearly, we are serving a different population today than just a few years ago. We have more students who need more specialized services and support.

One measure of this can be seen in the results of the recently released state assessments. Just 3.2 percent of English language learners and 19 percent of the economically disadvantaged scored at or above proficiency on the English Language Arts assessments, compared with 31 percent for all students. As the Common Core curriculum is implemented and standards are raised, the need to provide support for all students will grow, but this is especially true for those in high-needs groups.

And of course, schools don't just deal with students. We work with parents and those who care for students. All of this requires resources that have become increasingly scarce. Schools need the ability to hire more specialized staff and to engage the appropriate contractors to serve these students and their families.

Schools have also had to address issues around cultural competence -- the ability of students to accept and interact with others who are different from themselves. Addressing the issues around diversity -- through both curriculum and staffing -- is one key to maintaining a healthy environment in which educational services can be delivered. But again, this requires precious time and resources.

The issues associated with changing demographics will continue to grow. It won't be long before students from the Class of 2014 become Long Island's leaders. Hopefully, what they've experienced during these transformative years will give them the insight they need to deal with the challenges of ongoing change.

Gary D. Bixhorn is chief operating officer of Eastern Suffolk BOCES and the legislative chairman of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association.

COMMENTARY

Want lower property taxes? Eliminate the GEA



**Gary
BIXHORN**

The new school year brings with it a growing awareness of the importance of offering rigorous, high-quality career and technical education. We hear this from educational and economic policy experts at the federal, state and regional levels. However, at the same time, BOCES Career and Technical Education centers across Long Island remain an underutilized resource.

A February 2013 report by an Eastern Suffolk BOCES Task Force, presented at a Long Island Metro Business Action meeting, indicated that schools in the down-state suburbs, including Long Island, enroll a far lower percentage of eligible students in BOCES CTE programs than schools in other parts of the state.

Eastern Suffolk BOCES has been working with the state's Education Department to make CTE programs more accessible and affordable in our region.

New initiatives – including a pre-engineering program, an early college high school program and the availability of district-based programming – are at varying stages of implementation. Only time will tell if we can grow our enrollment to levels similar to the rest of the state, but we are optimistic.

Despite the challenges we face involving CTE offerings, the good news for Long Island schools is that grassroots community support has never been stronger.

Last May, every budget presented by

Long Island school districts received support from a majority of voters. Six of these budgets required a second vote because they needed a supermajority to gain approval, but a majority of voters supported their district's budget in Long Island – an unprecedented level of support.

This year, our challenge is to translate this level of community support into a regional movement advocating for improved state financial support for our schools.

This is nothing new. For many years, efforts to change the funding formulas have floundered as competition for limited dollars in Albany has intensified.

**THE GEA HAS REDUCED
STATE AID TO LONG ISLAND
SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY
NEARLY \$1 BILLION OVER
THE PAST THREE YEARS**

However, this year, a very simple message can be articulated: eliminate the GEA.

The Gap Elimination Adjustment is a formula in the state budget that reduces the amount of aid each school district is entitled to receive. New York State introduced the GEA in 2009-10 when it was known as the Deficit Reduction Assessment. It was used in 2011-12 to allocate an unprecedented \$2.56 billion statewide cut in aid; over the past three years, it has been used to reduce state aid to school districts statewide by \$6.35 billion.

The GEA has reduced state aid to Long Island school districts by nearly \$1 billion

over the past three years, with nearly half of this amount coming from our 28 low-wealth school districts.

The GEA further reduces our region's disproportionately low share of state aid, which currently stands at 21 percent of total revenues – as opposed to 40 percent in the rest of the state. Had the 2013-14 GEA been eliminated when the state budget was established, Long Island's current school tax levy would be nearly \$300 million, or 4 percent lower than it is now.

The GEA increases dependence on local property taxes to fund our schools. It's time for Long Islanders to stand up and speak with one voice to demand that the state eliminate the GEA and do its part to preserve our most valuable asset – our public schools.

Long Island is home to a diverse group of school districts with a limited but wide resource and achievement gap.

However, overall, the region's schools provide an unmatched quality of public education. So, as politicians and policy-makers are talking about educational accountability, school quality and the property tax burden during the upcoming year, let's remember the very simple message that will serve as a first step in reversing the eroding state share we have experienced.

Eliminate the GEA.

This, the subsequent overhaul of state-aid formulas and spending controls that evolve in response to the tax cap will ultimately allow us to preserve our public schools, a priceless regional asset.

Bixhorn is chief operating officer of Eastern Suffolk BOCES and legislative chairman of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association.