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2019-2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Providing Safe, Sustainable, High-Quality Equitable Education
One Island, One Voice, One Goal, Different Challenges

SUMMARY – FALL 2019

INCREASING STUDENT POVERTY RATES

- Over 37% of the students on Long Island qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.
- There has been a 52.1% (K-6) increase in free and reduced-price lunch numbers on Long Island since 2007-08, higher than any other region in the state.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- 17% of the state's total English Language Learner population is on Long Island.
- Four of the top 10 districts across New York State for enrollment of English Language Learners are on Long Island.
- 17 of the 22 districts in New York State that exceed 20% of their population in English Language Learner enrollment are on Long Island. All of those districts have over 60% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, combining the challenge of poverty and English language acquisition.
- Overall, Long Island has over 9% of English Language Learners as a percentage of enrollment.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

- Long Island has seen a 12% increase in the number of students with disabilities since 2007-08, compared to a 5.3% increase in the rest of the state.
- Teen hospitalizations on Long Island due to self-inflicted injuries exceed the statewide average.
- Nassau and Suffolk counties are in the top four counties statewide for deaths involving drugs.

SHIFTING PROPERTY WEALTH

- 44.5% of the students on Long Island live in districts with below-average wealth. 57.6% of the students are in Suffolk County and 29.1% are in Nassau County.
- Long Island property wealth has increased only 11% in the past 11 years, compared to the statewide increase of 39%.
- Incomes on Long Island are shifting. Long Island's income has only increased by 42% since 2007-08, compared to the overall statewide increase of 53%.

PREKINDERGARTEN EQUITY AND ACCESS

Vastly divergent prekindergarten access and experience translates into huge differences in school readiness by the age of 4. As the poverty rates on Long Island increase, it is important that we provide equitable access to pre-K for all students.

EQUITABLE SCHOOL SAFETY

Legislative actions that are essential to supporting school safety are as follows:

- Establish an expense-driven categorical aid with the designation of "School Security Aid" to partially reimburse districts for expenditures related to school security in a wealth-sensitive manner.
- Remove the earnings limit for retired law enforcement officers working as school security staff.
- Amend Election Law Section 4-104(3) to add public school buildings to the list of public places that can file a written request to be removed from the list of polling places.



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SUMMARY – FALL 2019 SHIFTING STUDENT NEEDS AND DISTRICT CHALLENGES

EQUITABLE SCHOOL SAFETY (CONTINUED)

- Require quarterly meetings of the Smart Schools Review Board to expedite dissemination of funds for the purposes of upgrades to safety-related items.
- Modify the tax levy limit calculation to exclude expenses related to school safety and security, and the use of the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) as a component of a measure of district wealth.
- Expand the School Resource Officer program and better synchronize legislation to preserve local control between law enforcement and school districts.
- Incorporate the costs of increased mandates related to cybersecurity in funding for school safety, as we respond to the mandate to protect personally identifiable information.

REVISED/REVAMPED FOUNDATION FORMULA

With the institution of the tax levy limit placing constraints on districts to raise local money, a multiyear formula for school aid would greatly assist school districts with long-term planning and budgeting. The year-after-year adjustments to the formula have only served to make it less effective. It is time to institute a statewide task force to do the hard work to revamp the formula in a way that makes sense for the changing district profiles and diverse demographics on Long Island.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE TAX LEVY CAP

There is little argument that the now-permanent tax levy cap has curbed the rise of taxes across the state. Now, it is time to make the necessary adjustments to the law to address the unintended consequences. In light of this, we advocate for the following prudent modifications:

- Establish a fixed 2% tax levy cap.

- Exempt the cost of community-approved school safety initiatives.
- Include BOCES capital costs to school districts in their tax levy cap calculations.
- Eliminate the possibility of negative tax levy caps.
- Include properties covered by PILOTS in the tax base.
- Exempt the cost of new government mandates.
- Exempt the ever-burgeoning costs of health insurance.

OUR STUDENTS NEED THEIR FAIR SHARE

There is much data that documents the changing demographics across Long Island. The reputation of the Island as one of the wealthiest parts of the state does a disservice to the needs of the increasing number of districts below the state average in wealth and the increasing needs of the students who live in them.

- Had Foundation Aid been fully funded, Long Island would be receiving an additional \$847 million in 2019-20, with 81.4% of that aid owed to low-wealth public school districts.
- The average amount owed per pupil to low-wealth school districts is \$3,040.
- The total amount of Foundation Aid owed to Long Island since 2007-08 is almost \$7.6 billion.
- Long Island schools continue to provide an outstanding education on the backs of the taxpayers who support them. Statewide, 68% of the school districts receive over 30% of their revenue from state aid, compared to only 21% of Long Island districts.
- Comparatively, 31% of districts on Long Island receive less than 10% of their revenue from the state, compared to only 9% statewide.