



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer Introduces Legislation to Ease Mandates on Schools

SUZI OPPENHEIMER May 27, 2009

| COMMITTEE: **EDUCATION**

State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) today announced the introduction of several bills aimed at providing much needed mandate relief for local school districts. The trio of legislative proposals would eliminate unnecessary and often duplicative reporting requirements, allow for greater consolidation and sharing of services between school districts, and provide a five year exemption from Wicks Law requirements for school construction projects.

The Education Mandate Relief Act of 2009, S. 5523 (Oppenheimer), authorizes school districts to enter into piggyback contracts with each other for the provision of transportation services and directs Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to work with school and community leaders to recommend ways to facilitate the provision of shared or consolidated services between school districts. The legislation would also require that any new unfunded mandates on school districts that are created after adoption of the school budget, be implemented no earlier than the following school year for which the budget was adopted.

The School Paperwork Elimination and Reduction Act of 2009, S. 3874 (Oppenheimer), would streamline the planning and reporting requirements placed on school districts and BOCES and require the Commissioner of Education to conform state reporting requirements to federal law, where possible, and to seek federal waivers where needed to align state and federal requirements. This bill has already passed through the Education and Finance Committees and is awaiting consideration by the full Senate.

Finally, S. 5559 (Oppenheimer), would allow school districts to hire a single general contractor for school construction projects rather than the multiple contractors currently required under the provisions of the Wicks Law. The legislation, which will sunset five years after enactment, allows for improved coordination of construction projects and is expected to result in significant construction cost savings for school districts.

“This is the most comprehensive and beneficial legislation we’ve seen to help school districts and their communities in quite some time,” said Timothy G. Kremer, Executive Director of the New York State School Boards Association. “It’s a major step forward in allowing school districts to best make use of their resources to help students succeed.”

Dr. Thomas Rogers, Executive Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, agreed. “The Council thanks Senator Oppenheimer for being a friend to school districts, and a champion of a quality education. Superintendents have worked hard to hold down local tax increases and that paid off with record voter support for school budgets this year,” noted Dr. Rogers. “But large fiscal challenges are still on the horizon and we appreciate Senator Oppenheimer’s proactive leadership in helping schools contain costs.”

“As chair of the Senate Education Committee, I have made mandate relief a priority of this legislative session,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “School districts must be freed from mandates that divert precious time and resources away from the education of our children. Eliminating unnecessary paperwork requirements, allowing for the more efficient provision of services and reducing school construction costs will ease budgetary pressures on local school districts and relieve the mounting financial burden on property taxpayers.”

“I am proud to sponsor these bills and will work hard for their passage,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “At this extraordinarily difficult time, we must do all we can to reduce school costs while preserving core educational programs.”