



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

# **Senator Oppenheimer Co-Hosts Panel Addressing Educational Access and Equity for Students WITH Disabilities**

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COMMITTEE:

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Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) recently co-hosted a panel presentation focusing on the vital need to ensure access and equity for students with disabilities amid times of economic uncertainty. The panel addressed a wide range of issues, including funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), state and local budget issues, mandate relief proposals and litigation reform.

In addition to Senator Oppenheimer, panel participants included Mark Leinung, New York State Assistant Secretary for Education; Rebecca Cort, Deputy Commissioner of the State Education Department; Michael Schulman, Co-President of the Counsel of New York Special Education Administrators, and Jay Worona, General Counsel of the New York State School Board Association. The event was co-sponsored by the New York State PTA Westchester-East Putnam Region Special Education Committee (SEPTA).

The panelists agreed on the need to foster greater trust between special education administrators and parents and discussed ways to improve the classification process through dispute resolution alternatives to litigation and other means. Senator Oppenheimer stressed her long-time support for universal Pre-K education, believing that early intervention could eliminate the need for later special education for some children.

"I was thrilled to join with SEPTA in bringing together all of the various stakeholders in the education of children with special needs," said Senator Oppenheimer. "The

discussion was productive and informative, reflecting the importance of working collaboratively with public officials, educators and parents to ensure that our most vulnerable students receive the quality education they deserve.”

The capacity crowd of invited guests included school superintendents, school board members, directors of special education programs and special education parent groups. The event was held on April 14th at the Gleeson-Israel Gateway Center of Westchester Arc in Hawthorne, New York.

Photo Caption: Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) co-hosted a panel discussion on educational access and equity for students with disabilities. Pictured with her are panelists Mark Leinung, New York State Assistant Secretary for Education and Rebecca Cort, Deputy Commissioner of the State Education Department.