



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer Chaired a Roundtable Discussion of School Officials and Education Policy Makers in White Plains. From R to L: NY Board of Regents, Harry Phillips, Senator Oppenheimer, NYS Senior Deputy Commissioner of Education, Dr. John King

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School Officials Roundtable Highlights Challenges and Successes of Local School Districts

Preserving a quality education in Westchester amid considerable economic challenges was the topic of discussion at a school officials roundtable organized by State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) last Thursday.

Senator Oppenheimer, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, led the meeting that was aimed at bringing together school administrators, board members, teachers and PTA leaders in the 37th Senate district with key education policymakers in New York State.

Joining Senator Oppenheimer were long-time NY Board of Regent Harry Phillips, who serves the counties of Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam and Rockland, and the NYS Senior Deputy Education Commissioner, Dr. John King.

A central theme of the roundtable was the need to maintain successful educational initiatives developed by local school districts, which are now threatened by state funding cuts and increased concern over escalating property taxes. School officials expressed fear that the Governor's proposed cuts in education aid would result in the elimination of quality programs, increased class sizes and layoffs of valuable teachers and staff.

To assist school districts in this difficult economy, Senator Oppenheimer, Regent Phillips and Senior Deputy Commissioner King discussed the need to provide mandate relief to school districts and to grant them additional flexibility to consolidate services and achieve cost savings. Senator Oppenheimer has sponsored legislation to accomplish these objectives, while the Department of Education (SED) has undertaken its own review of state mandated programs with an eye towards eliminating requirements that do not fulfill their intended objectives. While Senator Oppenheimer was optimistic about Senate passage of her legislation, she encouraged school officials to express their support to the Assembly and the Governor.

The far-reaching discussion also addressed revising the laws relating to contingency budgets, improving student assessments, updating curriculum requirements, reforming the tenure process, modifying pension requirements and closing the achievement gap for minority and disadvantaged children. School district officials at high performing districts spoke of the need to utilize state resources more effectively by targeting programs to schools that need them rather than imposing them on all schools throughout the state.

School district officials also encouraged Dr. King and the SED to visit their schools to study innovative science and other programs that were developed and achieved success in Westchester County.

“This productive roundtable continues an important dialogue between education policymakers in Albany and the educators, administrators and parents in my Senate district,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “I hope to facilitate more discussion in the future so that together we may better serve the needs of our most precious commodity – our children.”

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