



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer's Education Mandate Relief Package Passes Senate

SUZI OPPENHEIMER March 17, 2010

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Measures Reduce Unfunded Mandates and Provide Greater Flexibility to Contain Costs

Delivering on her promise to assist school districts and property taxpayers in these challenging economic times, Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) led her Senate

colleagues in passage yesterday of a broad education mandate relief package. The six bills, sponsored by Senator Oppenheimer, allow school districts to more effectively manage the resources they have and make the best possible budget decisions for their communities.

“Our current fiscal crisis compels us look for ways to restructure government at all levels to make it more efficient and cost-effective,” said Senator Oppenheimer, who chairs the Senate Education Committee. “The education reforms I have championed afford school districts relief from burdensome mandates, and the flexibility to contain costs, lessen the property tax burden and channel every available education dollar to classroom instruction.”

The key components of Senator Oppenheimer’s mandate relief plan include:

- The Education Mandate Relief Act of 2010 (S. 5523A) – This legislation expressly prohibits the imposition of new mandates after the start of a school fiscal year and allows Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to provide additional shared services to member districts, such as “piggyback” transportation contracts. The bill would also permit districts to create reserve funds for employer contributions to the Teachers’ Retirement System and to use a five year rolling average of the Consumer Price Index when calculating the contingency budget cap.
- Paperwork Reduction Act (S. 3874A) – Considered a priority by school districts, this bill requires the State Education Commissioner to establish a unified electronic data collection system in order to reduce the enormous costs of paperwork, mailing, processing and filing by the state education system. The legislation further requires the Commissioner to reduce or eliminate duplicative paperwork requirements for school districts.

- Universal Pre-Kindergarten Flexibility (S.6777) – This bill eliminates restrictions that have unduly limited the manner in which school districts have been able to use universal pre-kindergarten grants. The bill would permit districts to utilize unexpended funds more effectively, for example, by creating full day pre-kindergarten slots or supporting the costs of transporting children in the program.
- Flexibility in Claims Auditing (S. 5637) – This legislation would allow school districts to achieve cost savings with added flexibility to manage how claims auditing functions are performed.
- Sharing of High Speed Telecommunications and Community Relations Services (S.4634)
–Many BOCES have invested significant resources developing high speed telecommunications networks. This bill would permit libraries in the state to access these established networks, thereby reducing the costs of operating and maintaining the network for both parties.
- Flexibility in the Use of Textbook Funds (S. 6776) – This legislation would permit school districts to purchase scientific or mathematical manipulative materials with funds set aside for textbook purchases.

These reform measures were widely hailed by school superintendents, school boards and educators throughout the state, who stressed that the added flexibility would help them manage school budgets in a more prudent and cost-effective manner during the current fiscal crisis.

Said Florence D. Johnson, President of the New York School Boards Association: "School districts are facing some of the most difficult budget conditions in recent memory. This package of legislation would provide some flexibility and relief for school boards in areas of transportation, prekindergarten programs, reporting requirements and auditing, as well as require state lawmakers to give greater consideration to the cost of legislative and regulatory mandates going forward."

Robert Lowry, Deputy Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, thanked "Senator Oppenheimer and her Senate colleagues for their leadership in attempting to help school districts develop better budgets for the students and taxpayers they serve. Given the state's troubled fiscal outlook, superintendents are now wrestling with hard choices to balance school budgets that can preserve quality education for students while keeping taxes at levels their communities can sustain. We are grateful for the Senate's efforts to help school leaders maximize the impact of the resources taxpayers do provide."

Kevin Casey, Executive Director of the School Administrators Association of New York, added, "This legislation providing for mandate relief and the streamlining of reporting requirements will have a significant impact on the efficient operations of New York schools. We thank the Senate for their efforts and for supporting our public schools at this most critical time."

"If we are to maintain New York's legacy of educational excellence in these tough economic times, we must be mindful of the regulatory costs we impose on our schools that siphon

away resources from classroom instruction,” said Senator Oppenheimer. “The legislation we have approved creates meaningful structural reform that will lessen a school district’s regulatory burdens and empower it with the flexibility it needs to cut costs and contain property taxes.”

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Photo Caption: Senator Oppenheimer outlines her education reform legislation in advance of the vote by the full Senate. Standing beside her is Senator Brian X. Foley.