



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Legislature Passes Historic Education Reforms that will Enhance New York's Application for Race to the Top

SUZI OPPENHEIMER June 4, 2010

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, FINANCIAL AID**

| COMMITTEE: **EDUCATION**



Senator Oppenheimer Sponsors Legislative Package in Senate

Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck), chair of the Senate Education Committee, is pleased to announce passage of sweeping education reform legislation that will create a new statewide teacher evaluation system, raise the existing cap on charter schools, improve charter school accountability and transparency, and provide funding for a comprehensive

data system to track student achievement over time. The legislation is expected to strengthen New York's application for funding under the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) program, which is due on June 1st. If successful, New York may be able to secure as much as \$700 million in federal funding.

"I am very pleased that we were able to reach agreement on reforms that will allow New York to submit a very competitive application for Race to the Top funding," said Senator Oppenheimer. "More importantly, it is my hope that these reforms will spur innovation in education, address the achievement gap, and better prepare our teachers and students for the challenges of the 21st century."

The Legislature approved a package of bills that address components of the new education reforms. S. 7991 (A.11171), sponsored by Senator Oppenheimer, establishes new annual performance reviews for teachers and principals. These reviews will take into account, in part, student achievement as measured by state assessments. The bill authorizes reforms to the teacher evaluation process that were agreed to by the United Federation of Teachers and NYS United Teachers (NYSUT) two weeks ago. The support of the teachers unions in drafting new procedures was essential to putting this package together. "The teacher evaluation component of the RTTT application is the area where New York can gain the most points in the federal selection process," noted the Senator.

The Legislature also approved S. 7990 (A.11310), introduced by Senator Oppenheimer, which would permit the creation of 260 new charter schools over a four year period, while providing for greater accountability and transparency in the operation of these schools.

Specifically, this bill would:

- Impose new disclosure and ethics provisions to provide greater transparency and accountability;

- Authorize the State Comptroller to audit charter schools at his or her discretion to insure that public dollars are spent wisely;
- Ensure that charter schools serve children with disabilities, English language learners and free or reduced-price lunch program participants;
- Require the chancellor to develop building usage plans for the fair allocation and use of collocated space;
- Require that matching capital improvements are made to the traditional public school when a capital improvement exceeding \$5,000 is made to a charter school collocated on public school property; and
- Prohibit for-profit organizations from operating or managing any new charter schools.

“These are reasonable safeguards that will ensure that state education dollars are used appropriately by charter school administrators,” concluded Senator Oppenheimer, who noted that while charter schools are funded in part by property taxes, they are currently subject to almost no public oversight.

Finally, the Legislature approved a bill to provide financial support for a state data system, which will track student performance over time.

“I wish to thank my Senate and Assembly colleagues, Governor Paterson, Chancellor Merryl Tisch and the Board of Regents, as well as Department of Education Commissioner David Steiner for their leadership, dedication and hard work. Together, we have helped to preserve New York's place as a leader in educational innovation and progress.”

