



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

# So Long Summer, Hello School Year!

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**Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column**

It's hard to believe that students are gearing up for the start of another school year full of fun and new challenges. Just like students who will be studying hard, I'm working hard to ensure our children are getting the quality education they deserve and that parents and taxpayers receive the value they expect.

A big part of working to improve educational opportunities is listening to your opinions and ideas when it comes to our schools. Recently, nearly 2,100 parents, students and taxpayers weighed in on the state of education in our region through my 2013 School Survey, which covered everything from curriculum to school safety. Through the survey, most participants—84 percent—said that our schools are doing a great job educating future leaders, rating our schools as “excellent” or “good.” You can check out the [full results here](#).

This survey represents my latest effort to support Central and Northern New York schools. This year, New York State increased its commitment to public education with the largest school aid package in four years. In addition, the school aid package was weighted to rural and Upstate schools, and provides \$25 million more than last year in education aid to districts I represent in Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties.

While students are doing a lot to prepare for new teachers, classrooms, subjects and friends, it's also important for parents take steps to ensure a smooth beginning to the school year. Here are some tips to take you—and your family—smoothly from summertime to school time:

**SHOP SMART:** Between new clothes and supplies, shopping for back to school necessities can get expensive. Luckily, in New York State shoppers no longer pay state sales tax on clothing purchases up to \$110. This saves the typical family of four nearly \$200 per year. Also, when purchasing a backpack for your child, it's important to pick one that's lightweight with padded shoulder straps and a padded back that doesn't strain his or her back.

**STAY HEALTHY:** When it comes to academic performance, eating healthy is a key factor. Studies have shown that students who eat balanced, nutritious breakfasts and lunches are more alert throughout the school day and earn higher grades than children who have unhealthy diets.

**DRIVE SAFE:** As the school year begins, it's more important than ever to drive safe and be alert on the roads. Drivers must slow down when they see a school bus with flashing yellow lights, and state law requires drivers to stop when the red lights on a school bus are flashing—even if the bus is in the parking lot of a school. Also, when going in the opposite direction, drivers must stop at least 20 feet from a school bus to allow children to cross the roadway safely.

**GET INVOLVED:** Typically, students who succeed in the classroom have lots of support at home. It's important to get involved in your child's education by reading to them at home or having them read to you nightly, acknowledging and rewarding them for their accomplishments and getting to know their teachers as well as their schedule and subjects of study.

Back to school time can be one of the busiest and most stressful times of the year but remember, it can also be one of the most fun. If you have students who are heading back to the classroom, I wish you the

best of luck as you begin a new school year full of learning, excitement and new experiences.