



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #16: Ensuring A Quality Education

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO April 17, 2014

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I believe our children deserve equal access to a quality education, regardless of where they live, how much their parents earn or how much the house they live in is worth. I voted for this year's state budget because it will give children the opportunity for a brighter future.

The budget includes more than \$25 billion in total education aid, of which \$3.4 billion is dedicated to relief from school taxes. Through our advocacy, education aid increased by more than \$1.1 billion, or 5 percent – a larger percentage than any other major component of the budget. The schools in my district will receive a combined \$23 million more this year than last year.

I heard from dozens of education advocates before the budget passed. Their priority was clear: We need to eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment, which passed the Legislature despite my 'no' vote in 2010. It robbed our schools of \$2.8 billion. Thanks to our efforts, the final budget includes \$602 million to help districts recover from that unfair cut, reducing the GEA to \$1 billion.

My effort does not end here, however. I've voted in favor of legislation that would completely eliminate the GEA by the 2016-17 school year – and I'll continue to advocate for getting it done sooner.

I also talked to many teachers, parents and students about some of their concerns with Common Core. It's important to get teenagers ready for college or a career after graduation. But it's clear the Board of Regents fumbled the rollout of this curriculum, leading to a lot of unnecessary anxiety and confusion.

The new budget will better protect student privacy, as well as ensure that results from the recently completed Common Core tests won't be used for grade promotion decisions. The bill ensures that our children won't be subjected to Common Core testing before third grade and also includes more funds for teacher centers to help educators continue to develop professionally.

I was pleased to see that schools were given flexibility on how to use new pre-K funding, but I remain concerned about the number of mandates districts face. I've sponsored a bill that requires the state to fund any program which imposes a mandate upon a school, which passed the Senate last year. This is the root cause of diminishing fund balances and rising taxes, so it's my hope that the Legislature addresses this problem in the near future.

This budget provides a significant increase in aid to schools, while helping students succeed. That is why I voted 'yes.'