



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Press Release: Senate Democratic Conference Unveils Legislation To Improve Education System

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

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Package addresses failures in this year's budget and the Common Core rollout

Albany, NY - This week the Senate Democratic Conference, led by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, introduced bills to reform the state's public school system and address the concerns raised by education stakeholders due to the proposed changes made in the 2015 State Budget. The legislative package will implement reforms to the teacher evaluation system, increase fairness for student assessments and provide support for community schools that offer wraparound social services.

"Each member of the State Legislature has a constitutional and moral responsibility to ensure that every child in New York State has access to a quality education," Senate Democratic Conference Leader Stewart-Cousins said. "The bills introduced by the Senate Democratic Conference will help undo the damage caused by the rushed-through education changes resulting from this year's State Budget. The stakeholders in our state's education system have been clear - we need to stop over-testing students and demonizing teachers for the failings in the public education system and finally address the root problems. The Senate Democratic Conference will keep up the fight to improve our public education system and it is my hope that under its new leadership, the Senate Republican Majority will join with us to make these necessary reforms."

Senator Stewart-Cousins (35th SD) and Senator George Latimer (37th SD), the Ranking Member on the Senate Education Committee, both represent Yonkers in the

State Senate among other communities in their respective districts. Senator Latimer said, “Students, parents and educators across New York State have loudly voiced their concerns over recent misguided education policies. The recent state budget and the Common Core rollout has demonized hard working teachers, continues to overburden our kids with standardized tests and has failed to adequately fund public schools in struggling communities. It’s now time for the State Senate Republicans to hear their voices and join with the Democratic Conference to pass these needed bills to fulfill our Constitutional responsibilities and put our public education system back on the right track.”

The package of education bills will:

- Repeal a provision implemented in the 2015 State Budget that allows New York State to withhold additional school aid from districts should they not have their “Annual Professional Performance Review Plans” approved by the Commissioner of Education by November 15, 2015
- School districts will no longer be forced to choose between unreasonable evaluation requirements and sufficient financial support from the state
- Implement an advisory council to advise on and review “Annual Professional Performance Review Plans”
- Restore use of the locally negotiated “student achievement metric” for teacher evaluations and make it available to school districts as part of the optional supplemental assessment subcomponent of the student performance category
- The “student achievement metric” more fairly assesses children who are above grade-level as well as students with special needs
- Restoring this metric will make assessments more realistic and useful for school districts to determine teachers’ performances
- Study the costs associated with statewide assessments of students in school districts throughout New York State
 - This would provide an important analysis of how public resources are spent for educational testing, curriculum building, graduation requirements and other essential components to developing effective education policy
 - The information collected will help start a statewide conversation on how taxpayer funds are distributed and utilized
- Establish the “Community Schools Grant Program” to fund community schools that offer wraparound social services
 - This program would create high quality, culturally relevant curriculum, health, social and emotional services in high needs communities, and then share the best practices across the state and nation

- The State Education Commissioner would be directed to award competitive grants to eligible school districts to use existing school buildings as community hubs
- Make the use of independent, outside evaluators optional instead of required
- The enacted 2015 State Budget imposed an unfunded mandate by requiring school districts to utilize outside evaluators to observe and assess teachers
- This legislation would reform that practice by making the use of outside evaluators optional and not required

The Senate Democratic Conference also called for \$682 million in new settlement funds to be invested in an education infrastructure bank. These funds will be utilized to pay for needs associated with health and safety, accessibility, physical capacity and school construction projects. This essential investment, which was left out of the enacted 2015 State Budget, will help rebuild crumbling public schools across New York State and help create good local jobs. Funds for this program will come from the state's projected surplus and are separate from the Smart Schools Bond Act.