



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Education equity must be a priority in New York

SAMRA G. BROUK January 7, 2021

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The past year has challenged parents and educators in ways they couldn't have imagined. Teachers have had to adapt to the constraints of the virtual classroom, while parents have been thrust into the role of support staff, making daily sacrifices in service of their children's learning.

This difficult time has also revealed the stark differences in families' economic circumstances, with many learners lacking reliable internet or enough food to sustain them through the day. As we discuss our budget priorities for the new year, full and equitable funding for our public schools must be at the top of the list.

The first CARES Act package, which was passed in April of last year, provided our state with \$1.1 billion in emergency school aid. The Governor then cut that exact amount in state aid in the budget, putting a severe strain on schools serving our highest need learners. For schools in Monroe and Ontario Counties that meant missing out on tens of millions in aid—funds that could have been used to hire more teachers and support staff. We can't let this happen again.

The late December federal relief package includes \$54.3 billion for K-12 schools to support with expenses related to reopening, including cleaning equipment and ventilation upgrades

to lower the risk of virus transmission. Based on the Title I formula, we can expect New York to receive approximately \$4 billion in education aid. It's our responsibility to use the federal funds as they were intended—and not as an excuse to keep school budgets flat.

New York ranks near the very bottom of the country when it comes to funding equity. As someone who attended both our city and suburban public schools, I've seen education inequality in effect. Discrepancies have only been made worse by remote learning, as low-income students—disproportionately students of color—are the most likely to lack reliable high-speed internet or quiet study spaces. On top of that, many students have parents who are frontline workers and can't stay home with them during the workday. The obstacles have been even greater for English language learners and students with disabilities.

When we talk about building back stronger, public education has to be part of that conversation. We can't return to the status quo of under-resourced schools and overstretched teachers. For many students, school is where they get their first meal of the day, access health care, or receive personal counseling. Public schools are the investment we make in our community's future.

We must ensure the latest federal relief funds make their way to our local schools and are not carved out for other expenses.

*Senator Samra Brouk represents New York's 55th Senate District that covers portions of Monroe and Ontario counties, including Rush, Mendon, Pittsford, Perinton, Fairport, Penfield, East Rochester, East Irondequoit, Naples, Bloomfield, Victor, and the east side of the City of Rochester.*