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BACK TO SCHOOL NEWS:

A Special Report from **NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.**



Dear Friends:

August, 2012

It's almost that time! Although summer isn't quite over, it won't be long before the trees start turning colors and our kids start turning back to hitting the books as another school year gets off to a start. With opening day for New York City schools coming up fast on September 6th, I thought you might be interested in learning about some new laws and legislative proposals affecting our students and schools, as well as some other issues of concern to both parents and pupils.

In the end, we all want the best for our young people: a quality education, good health, fun and recreation, and safety from any kind of mental or physical threats to their well-being. As a father myself, there are few things as vitally important to me as the happiness and success of my children, and I know I am just like other parents when it comes to my constant concerns about their welfare both inside and outside the classroom.

As we get closer to the daily rush of making it to school before the bell rings, and look ahead to the nights of trying to help out with homework, I hope this report finds you well. Please enjoy these wonderful last few weeks of summer and the coming fall, and don't hesitate to contact me if I may ever be of any assistance to you in the community.

Sincerely,

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TAKING AIM AGAINST BULLYING...FACE TO FACE AND ON FACEBOOK

The stereotype of the school bully who knocks down other kids to steal their lunch money has been around for a long time. But in this age of the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, texting, e-mail, blogs, smart phones and other forms of instantaneous – and widespread – electronic communication, bullies barely need to lift a finger to make the lives of fellow students miserable. All they need is a “send” or “post” button to hurt others.

Tragic news reports both here in New York and across the nation have brought home to all of us that bullying can lead to severe emotional distress for young

people and may also lead them to take their own lives. Whether it's by electronic means, or face to face harassment or violence, bullying is a serious threat to both the mental and physical health of our children.

In concert with the “Dignity for All Students Act” passed in 2010 to help combat bullying, discrimination and harassment among school children of different backgrounds, New York State just recently enacted a new law to define electronic “cyberbullying” and require all schools to come up with plans to address this very serious issue. I was proud to support this legislation, and hope it will ensure more children a school experience that has more to do with learning and having fun, and less to do with defending themselves against bullying both on-line and on the street.

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE BEING BULLIED

Often, children are afraid to tell others, even their parents or teachers, that they are being bullied. So here are some telltale signs that your child may be a bullying victim, and that it may be time for a heart-to-heart talk. But since some children don't demonstrate signs of being victimized even when it's happening, try to keep the lines of communication open with your kids all of the time. Look out for children:

- Coming home from school with damaged, ripped or missing clothing or other possessions;
- Having unexplained cuts and bruises;
- Isolating themselves from friends and family members;
- Seeming afraid to go to school: whether walking to and from classes, riding the bus or participating in school activities;
- Lacking interest in schoolwork and having poor grades;
- Complaining often of headaches, stomach aches and other physical problems, and lacking an appetite;
- Suffering from nightmares and difficulty sleeping;
- Feeling helpless, and demonstrating a lack of self esteem;
- Engaging in self-destructive behavior, running away, or talking about suicide.

HOW STUDENTS CAN PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM CYBERBULLYING

It's hard for children to get away from bullies who show up every time they log on to their computer, check their text messages or sign into social media. Parents can help protect their children by monitoring their Internet habits, talking to them about bullying and being aware of worrisome changes in their behavior.

But when faced with a cyberbully, there are some simple steps that children themselves can take to fight back and not feel so victimized and powerless. For example, young people can be encouraged to:

- Tell someone – a parent, teacher or other trusted adult – about the cyberbullying, and report it;
- Save – don't delete – the bully's messages. Saving them on a computer or cell phone so they are easily found can help provide evidence of bullying if it is needed;
- Ignore and don't open e-mails, texts and other communications from people who have previously sent nasty messages;

- Block cyberbullies who attack them during chats or in other social media forums;
- Refuse, always, to see someone they just met on-line in person, unless a trusted adult is told and brought along to the meeting.

LEGISLATIVE NOTEBOOK: NEW YORK'S SCHOOLS & STUDENTS



Senator Addabbo greets students and faculty from P.S. 88 who visited Albany to tour the State Capitol and learn more about government.

In addition to the new cyberbullying law mentioned elsewhere, the Legislature took other welcome action to aid our schools and students during the 2012 legislative session. As a member of the Senate Education Committee, Senate Select Committee on Libraries, and as a representative on the Joint State Budget Conference Committee on Education, I was pleased to support these initiatives:

- An \$805 million increase in state education aid, which will bring New York City schools \$292 million more than last year;
- A funding increase of almost \$4 million for libraries, as well as \$14 million for a library capital construction program;
- A \$7 million increase in Comprehensive Attendance Program (CAP) funds for non-public schools;
- A \$10.2 million restoration of funds for Teacher Resource Centers;
- A law (Chapter 42) to restore yellow school bus service for more than 4,000 7th and 8th graders in New York City, including some in Queens, who lost this needed transportation in 2010;
- A proposal (S6854/A.10141) passed by both the Senate and Assembly, and awaiting the Governor's review, to prohibit smoking within 100 feet of the entrances or exits of public or private elementary and secondary schools;

- Legislation (A7591/S5650) passed by both the Senate and Assembly, which I co-sponsored, to improve services provided to children up to five years old in day care by requiring a comprehensive study of current programs, with recommendations for improvement, by the State Education Department, Office of Children and Family Services and Department of Health;
- An extra \$31.3 million for community colleges, provided through a much-needed base aid increase, and a \$28 million increase for New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP);
- Popular academic opportunity programs – EOP, HEOP, STEP and CSTEP – had proposed cuts restored.



To help pre-school students at Reach for the Stars learn more about the history of their state, Senator Addabbo presented the school with an official New York State flag.

TEACHER & PRINCIPAL EVALUATION LAWS PASSED

As a condition of being able to compete for federal “Race to the Top” education funds, New York was required this year to create a system for evaluating the professional performances of school teachers and principals throughout the state. Two new laws establish the overall framework for the evaluation process and govern how educator performance information will be provided to both the public and parents.

I believe these laws strike the correct balance between protecting the confidentiality rights of school teachers and principals while ensuring that parents will be able to learn how their own children's educators are performing. Earlier calls to fully disclose individual evaluations to the public, with the names of all teachers attached, simply went too far. While I support the concept of teacher evaluation, I

also recognize that performance judgments may be subjective in some ways and not reflect the day-to-day challenges that teachers face in trying to engage children of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Every child is different, with varying strengths and weaknesses, and every child's path to academic success will differ as well.

Under the new laws, information about teacher and principal performance, without individual names, will be made widely available to the public to offer a statewide picture of the effectiveness of individual school districts in helping their students to succeed. Parents will be able to request and receive information about the principals and teachers who are directly involved with their own children, and will also be provided assistance in understanding the meaning of the evaluations. I am pleased that a reasonable compromise was reached on this controversial issue.

FIGHTING FOR OUR LOCAL SCHOOLS

As you may know, I fought very hard earlier this year to defeat proposals by the New York City Department of Education to keep three high schools in my district – Grover Cleveland, John Adams, and Richmond Hill – from being closed and reopened this fall under a “turnaround” process requiring that many of their administrators and teachers be removed.

I was pleased that Grover Cleveland was initially spared this reorganization, and I am continuing to work with the community, Department of Education and other interested parties on the future fate of John Adams and Richmond Hill High Schools in light of the recent court decision to leave these schools open. While I disagreed with the City's decision to close these schools, in light of their efforts in past years to improve their performance, we must now work together to provide a brighter academic future for their students. I encourage those who are concerned about this issue to contact my office for the most updated information.

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT DATING VIOLENCE

Earlier this year, I sponsored two Teen Dating Violence IOI Interactive workshops in local high schools to help raise awareness of an often unacknowledged and serious problem: abusive relationships among young people. In the workshops, conducted by Day One's Community Education Program, teens learned about such topics as the warning signs of an abusive relationship, the different types of abuse that exist,

obstacles to ending an abusive relationship and how to help a friend in need.

Government studies, as well as surveys of teens, present some grim statistics on this issue. For example, two in 10 teen girls, and one in 10 teen boys, say they have been physically and/or sexually abused by their partner. Only 33 percent of teens who have been in an abusive dating relationship have told anyone about it. The majority of parents of teen victims are unaware of the abuse. More than half of the victims say they have compromised their own beliefs to satisfy a boyfriend or girlfriend.

I was pleased to bring these informative workshops to teenagers in my district and am working on the state level as well to draw attention to this heartbreaking issue. I am a co-sponsor of legislation (S.708), known as "The Jennifer Tush Act," which would require dating violence education and dating violence policies in schools throughout the state. The bill is named after a 19-year-old Staten Island woman who was brutally abducted, raped and murdered by her boyfriend of only eight months after she broke up with him. I hope that one day this potentially life-saving legislation will be approved by the Legislature and signed into law.



Senator Addabbo addresses high school students at a Dating Violence 101 workshop he sponsored earlier this year.

TAKE A LOAD OFF... BACKPACK SAFETY TIPS

Virtually all students these days carry backpacks during the school year for books and other supplies. When used properly, backpacks are recognized by health professionals as an efficient means of carrying a load and distributing the weight among some of the body's strongest muscles.

However, in 2002, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that backpack-related injuries were sending almost 6,000 students each year to emergency rooms, and the American Academy of Orthopedics has called backpack injury a

significant problem for children. The key to preventing backpack injuries, and saving trips to the doctor, lies in purchasing the right backpack for your child, and making sure they use and wear it correctly.

Here are some tips to consider:

- When choosing the right backpack, look for one that is lightweight, has two wide and padded shoulder straps, a cushioned back, and waist straps.
- Always encourage your child to use both shoulder straps and make sure the straps are tight.
- Limit your child's backpack to no more than 15 to 20 percent of his/her body weight.
- Organize your child's supplies and books so that the heaviest items are closest to the center of his/her back and all compartments are used.
- Persuade your child to stop at his/her locker often so they're not carrying all of their books throughout the day.



Senator Addabbo speaks to students at the St. Pancras School in Glendale who worked with him to create cards for a "Valentines for Vets" project to cheer veterans in the St. Albans Veterans Nursing Home.

QUICK LINK: CONTACTING YOUR SCHOOLS

The New York City Department of Education link below can help you find detailed information about the schools your children attend, and the names of important contact people, including principals and parent coordinators, who may be able to answer your education-related questions.

www.schools.nyc.gov



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