

Spring Valley NAACP
62 N. Main Street
Spring Valley, NY 109077

8

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND BUDGET AND
REVENUES**

Public Hearing

To examine the distribution of the Foundation Aid Formula as it relates to pupil and district needs

Tuesday, December 3, 2019
250 Broadway
NY, NY

Spring Valley National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
62 N. Main Street, Spring Valley 10977
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Education Committee
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December 3, 2019

Dear Members of the Standing Committees on Education and Budget and Revenues:

I am speaking on behalf of the Spring Valley NAACP regarding the children attending East Ramapo's public schools. The urgency for the state to meet its commitment to provide the \$24 million owed the East Ramapo district under its Financial Aid obligations cannot be overstated. No less important, and carrying wider long-term implications for other districts beginning to experience similar threats around the state, is the need to address a crisis in governance.

The East Ramapo Central School District consists of about 35,000 children; with 9400 students, mostly black and brown children, attending public schools; and with about 25,000 students, mostly white, attending private schools. The majority of its board members are primarily interested in the 25,000 children attending the private schools.

According to Henry Greenberg, appointed by Governor Cuomo in 2014 to conduct a fiscal study of East Ramapo, the District has had an unusually high rate of austerity budgets followed by draconian spending cuts to public school programs and services. The study concluded that public-school students "were being denied essential educational experiences, services and programs, that the board turned statutory and regulatory structure on its head giving short shrift to the needs of the public-school children." ¹ As cuts took place in the public schools "no meaningful effort was made to distribute the pain of deep budget cuts fairly among private and public schools." ²

Between 2009-2018, there has been a net loss of 321 East Ramapo public-school full-time positions, including, for example, 111 elementary and secondary teachers, 14

¹ East Ramapo: A School District in Crisis, Henry M. Greenberg, Fiscal Monitor for The New York State Education Department, Nov. 18, 2014

² Ibid.

special education teachers, 14 social workers, 3 nurses, 12 deans, and 11 assistant principals. During this period, the public school enrollment increased twenty-percent.

The cuts have led East Ramapo to be the lowest achieving district in Rockland. For example, Rockland's eight school districts' high school graduation rate in 2018 was 87 percent; whereas East Ramapo's was 58 percent. Rockland's eight districts' average Algebra 1 Regents score was 83 percent; East Ramapo's was 39 percent.

In New York state, private schools receive state funds for all state-mandated services such as student transportation, text book aid and special education, whether or not a budget has been passed. There is simply no incentive for the private school community to vote for a public-school budget that requires an increase in property taxes.

According to State monitor Charles Szuberla, Jr., 93% of NYS school districts passed budgets in the last five years, while East Ramapo was an outlier with three contingency budgets in the last five years. "For this District, it is not enough to simply pass a budget within the tax levy cap... the district has already fallen behind other districts that have managed to consistently pass budgets. the only way for the District to catch up is to begin passing small tax levy overrides. ...the District cannot sustain another contingency budget."³

East Ramapo has a short-term financial crisis and a long-term school governance crisis.

It is critical that East Ramapo receive the \$24 million owed to it under the current State formula in order to begin to catch up to the other seven Rockland districts. Without immediate economic relief and future radical governance reform, East Ramapo, and similar districts, are imperiled.

³ Continuing Progress: A Report on the East Ramapo Central School District, December 2018 Charles A. Szuberla, Jr. Monitor, John W. Sipple, Monitor

Recommendations

1. State to fully fund the \$24 million owed to East Ramapo public schools to allow the District to begin to fill the 321 positions not yet replaced during the period draconian cuts were being made. (Positions to include, but not be limited to 111 elementary and secondary teachers, 14 special education teachers, 14 social workers, 3 nurses, 12 deans, 11 assistant principals)
2. State to ensure money will reach the public-school classrooms and not be diverted out of the public schools into private schools
3. Legislation: include in budget language:
 - a. Foundation Aid may not be diverted to private schools
 - b. Foundation Aid may not be used to supplant funding that is currently going to public schools
4. Legislation: appointment of monitors to East Ramapo with power to override decisions of the school board or superintendent
5. Legislation: appointment of a State task force/commission charged with developing a functional governance model for East Ramapo and school districts experiencing similar challenges

On behalf of the Spring Valley NAACP, thank you for your continued commitment to our community's marginalized and disenfranchised children.

Oscar Cohen, Ed.D.
Spring Valley NAACP
Education Committee