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THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



**ROBERT G. ORTT**  
**SENATOR, 62<sup>ND</sup> DISTRICT**

**ALBANY OFFICE:**  
815 LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247  
(518) 455-2024  
FAX: (518) 426-6987

**DISTRICT OFFICE:**  
175 WALNUT STREET, SUITE 6  
LOCKPORT, NEW YORK 14094  
(716) 434-0680  
FAX: (716) 434-3297

May 29, 2018

New York State Education Department  
MaryEllen Elia, Commissioner  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, New York 12234

Dear Commissioner Elia:

I am writing to bring to your attention the unacceptably slow pace of the SmartSchools NY Program. I represent the Newfane Central School District, who applied on April 10, 2017 and is only now in the third of five review phases.

New York's students deserve the best educational resources available, and the SmartSchools program was implemented to make that happen. However, the application process is filled with red tape that has caused this exciting program to screech to a halt.

I understand that these applications can't be processed overnight, and that the review process helps to ensure public dollars are being spent effectively. However, there is no reason that a district who applied 14 months ago should still be awaiting a decision. Those dollars do not help any children as long as they're tied up in Albany.

Newfane applied for funding to install Wi-Fi in their classrooms. It's no secret that the internet is an essential tool in our economy, and we're doing a disservice to those students by failing to provide internet access to them. The longer this process takes, the more they fall behind their peers.

NYSED posts on its website status updates to inform school districts which phase they're in, but provides no timeframe for when districts can expect to receive a decision. For example, Newfane has been in the "Expenditure Review" phase for over six months. This makes budgeting very difficult for superintendents, as their original quotes become outdated and they're left wondering if they can afford a new project, or if they need to look for alternative funding sources.

I urge you to investigate ways in which the SmartSchools application review process can be expedited for all districts, but especially Newfane Central Schools. Unfortunately, SED's only response up to this point has been to insist that the Legislature provide more funds. Although we

can debate the merits of such funding, at this stage I believe SED should look for other – particularly, administrative – approaches. At the very least, districts should be given an approximation on how long the review will take. It is my hope that SED can find ways to continue to help our students, effectively spend public dollars, and do so in a timely fashion.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please write to me or call my office at (716) 434-0680 to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert G. Ort", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert G. Ort  
Senator, 62<sup>nd</sup> District

RGO:jmv