



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFS...

June 2011

Tax Cap Legislation Introduced in the Assembly

On May 24, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver introduced legislation, A7916, touted to “provide real relief for hard working men and women across New York State by capping local property taxes at two percent while at the same time including important safeguards to ensure communities are able to provide critical services for their citizens.” The legislation prohibits local governments and school districts from exceeding the two percent threshold on the total tax levy and requires a 60 percent vote to override the levy. Check out the Assembly bill at:

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=A.7916&term=2011>.

NYSUT Fact Sheet: http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/bulletins_16642.htm.

NYS PTA Position: Following a year in which 93.5% of NYS communities adopted responsible school budgets, the announcement of a conceptual agreement on property tax caps raises serious concerns. While we recognize the need for tax relief, there are simply too many unanswered questions and too much at stake to rush blindly into action that could destroy New York’s schools in the name of property tax relief. We continue to oppose this measure and ask that, before adopting such an onerous and regressive measure, responsible policy makers first ask the following critical questions.

1. Where is the mandate relief that so many legislators cited as necessary to assure their support of cap legislation? Even the Governor’s Mandate Relief Task Force delayed decisions regarding cost drivers, stating “each of these complex issues has a long history and addressing them will be a challenge requiring further review, discussion and feedback.”
2. Considering no relief of cost drivers has been offered and there exists an additional hit of a two percent cap on STAR relief buried deep within the governor’s budget, where is the relief to the home owner whose income cannot support current levels of taxation?
3. How will legislators ensure a level playing field that will permit districts of differing need and wealth to address the State’s demand for increased rigor of standards and accountability and the fiscal challenges brought on by aid reductions and caps?

Tax caps are claimed to be effective when revenue is healthy and cost drivers mitigated. Even with this, as is the case in Massachusetts, tax caps enhance educational inequities. If decision makers choose to ignore facts and evidence in favor of political popularity, then at the very least they need to have the courage to adopt the measure in conjunction with relief from educational cost drivers. To date, there is no plan, no guarantee of relief, and no assurance of the promise of foundation aid. If these concerns cannot be addressed, and the State is unable or unwilling to apply additional revenues to level the playing field without sacrificing the highest performing school districts in the process, then it would be utterly irresponsible to even consider legislation imposing caps.

The final question will then be: How will legislators reconcile with their constituents the true cost of a tax cap that erodes the educational and economic well-being of their home districts?

PLEASE TAKE ACTION! Let your state legislators know that NYS PTA opposes this onerous and regressive measure!

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Advertising on School Buses?

Controversial bills have been introduced into the state legislature to allow school districts to sell ad space on school buses. Bills A07701 (Englebright) and S03229-A (Grisanti) would give school boards the right to sell advertising space on the exterior sides of school buses that are either owned or leased

by the district. If approved, the law would amend the State's Education Law so "...any school district in the state may enter into a contract for the sale of advertising space on the exterior sides of school buses owned or leased by the school district..."

The bills would prohibit advertisements for tobacco and alcohol products or for political campaigns. The advertisements would also need to be approved by the local board of education before placement. The revenue for the ads would be fully retained by the school district. But, according to the text of the bill, the provisions do not apply to cities with populations of one million people or more. The bill is currently being reviewed by the Assembly Committee on Education.

There has been considerable debate about advertising on school buses. Some believe it is a legitimate and reasonable means for obtaining additional revenue to maintain school bus operations. Others believe it is a mistake to place exterior advertising on school buses, particularly with respect to safety. The New York Association for Pupil Transportation (NYAPT) is calling on state lawmakers to keep the school buses yellow and not allow advertising on them.

For more information:

<http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/wamc/news.newsmain/article/0/0/1804025/WAMC.New.York.News/Legislation.would.allow.ads.on.school.buses>.

For a draft of the bill, visit: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=S03229&term=2011>.

Check out the National Association of State Directors of Pupil Transportation (NASDPT) position paper: <http://www.nasdpts.org/Documents/Paper-AdvertisingOnSB-3-11.pdf>.

NYSUT Reacts to Regents Adoption of New Teacher/Principal Evaluation System

Threats of a lawsuit by the NYS teachers' union were one reaction to the state Board of Regents' passage in May of a new evaluation system for teachers and principals. The New York State Board of Regents voted 13-3 in favor of adopting new regulations that abide by Gov. Andrew Cuomo's request that the evaluations place more emphasis on student growth and achievement through standardized testing than on more subjective criteria.

Read more at: http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/nysutunited_16610.htm.

To view the new regulations, go to:

<http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/EvaluatingTeacherPrincipalEffectiveness.BORAdoptRules.html>.

A Victory for PIRCs, a Victory for Families!

The *Setting Priorities in Education Spending Act (H.R. 1891)*, the Committee's first bill on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was introduced in the House by Rep. Hunter on Friday, May 13. The bill contained language to repeal 43 program authorizations for ED programs, including authorization for Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), a key facet of the Family Engagement in Education Act and the ONLY federal program dedicated to family engagement in education.

As a champion of family engagement and the lead sponsor of the Family Engagement in Education Act (H.R. 1821), Congressman Todd Platts (R-PA) decided to offer an amendment to strike the repeal of the PIRC program for consideration during the full committee markup of H.R. 1891 in the House Education and Workforce Committee. With very little turnaround time, National PTA launched coordinated call-ins, distribution of program data, and mapped relationships to ensure key points of influence. Additionally, the policy team worked behind the scenes with Minority Committee staff to ensure endorsement of the amendment and whipping of democratic votes.

The Committee voted "yes" on the Platts Amendment to save the PIRC program by a vote of 20-19. H.R. 1891 now moves to the House floor for consideration before the full chamber, where it is expected to pass. **This was a huge victory for family engagement in education!**

Read Congressman Platts' statement to Congress in favor of parent engagement:

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/pa19_platts/pirc.shtml.