



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFS...

January 2009

Update: Where Are We with the Commission for Property Tax Relief?

Despite doubts that the December 1st deadline would be met, the Suozzi Commission on Property Tax Relief released its final report to the governor on time, as charged. Over the course of many months the Commission held hearings throughout the state to invite public participation. Disregarding much of the testimony of education and child advocates warning of the regressive nature and devastating effects on school districts by capping tax levies, particularly in light of the crushing reduction in state revenues, the primary philosophy of the Commission and executive office is cap first, deal with cost drivers later. According to the Commission and governor, recommendations cited within the report are projected to reduce costs for local school districts and provide relief to New York's taxpayers. At a December morning breakfast meeting between Governor Paterson and the Long Island Association (business groups), the governor supported the report stating that once a cap is in place, then "we can work around the ancillary issues". Please refer to the New York State PTA White Paper and testimony in the Advocacy Section of www.nyspta.org for our responses to this idea. The Commission's 137 page report is divided into three sections:

1. New York State's Commitment to Public Education
2. Identification of "The Problem" (why property taxes are so high).
3. Recommendations: there are 32 recommendations within the following categories:
 - Implementation of a property tax cap
 - Changing state law and mandate relief
 - School district personnel and other school district operational costs
 - Special education
 - Economies of scale and enhanced educational opportunity (consolidation and shared services)
 - Encourage efficient delivery of social services to students in schools.
 - Address other equity concerns for property taxpayers (**rural schools and** statewide property assessment standards).

To download and read report in its entirety:

http://www.cptr.state.ny.us/reports/CPTRFinalReport_20081201.pdf

Around the State:

Who's Sitting In My Chair?

Since the Democrats victorious Albany takeover with their November win in both state houses, Senate and Assembly, there has been ongoing speculation as to who will be the new Senate Pro Temp/ Majority Leader or the "third" man in a room. The phrase "three men in a room" refers to the governor, Senate Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker. Current Senate Minority Leader, Malcolm Smith stands in line to become Senate Pro Temp/Majority Leader but has been challenged by a group of downstate Democratic senators dubbed the "Gang of Three", Senators Ruben Diaz, Pedro Espada, Jr. and Paul Kruger. They have threatened to shift leadership support away from Smith and have been said to be "flirting" with Republicans to regain the state's highest Senate post. On Monday, December 8th, power trading deals were made to secure Smith in the post, however, Smith reneged on Friday, December 10th. At the writing of this newsletter, there seems to be a power outage. For more information...

<http://www.legislativegazette.com/printable.php?id=3357>

<http://www.timesunion.com/AspStories/story.asp?storyID=749040&category=STATE>

Senator Saland Holds Hearing on Four-day School Week

In what appeared to be an effort to address cost-savings through examining the feasibility of a proposal for legislation allowing school districts to adopt a flexible school week, Senator Stephen Saland (R-Poughkeepsie) held a public hearing to ascertain potential advantages and disadvantages to a flexible school week from the perspective of education stakeholders. New York State PTA participated in the hearing by providing testimony based on the challenges that parents and schools may face by enactment of legislation to implement this idea. While NYS PTA believes flexibility of school calendars remains a local decision we encourage the Senator to consider the operational realities that schools, parents and communities would face. For more information...

http://www.legislativegazette.com/read_more.php?story=3369

For NYS PTA Testimony:

<http://www.nyspta.org/advocacy/testimony.cfm>

Regents Propose a 4.1% Hike in School Aid for 2009-10

In response to the state's ongoing economic crisis, the state Board of Regents proposed a 4.1 percent increase in state aid for next school year while recommending ways to reduce costs through mandate relief and by reining in special education spending.

The \$879 million proposed state aid hike is nearly \$1 billion less than the increase called for in the four-year plan begun in 2007 under former Governor Eliot Spitzer. Regents Chancellor Robert M. Bennett said, 'Economic necessity prompts innovation. Our proposal recommends sustaining foundation aid while reducing the increase by half, greatly reducing the State's deficit.' For the Regents proposal...

http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/stateaid_2009.htm

[Around the Capitol:](#)

National PTA Presents New E-newsletter from the Capitol

Replacing National PTA's weekly newsletter, *This Week in Washington*, will be a new monthly electronic publication to keep you informed on what's happening in Washington DC - where *your* voice can help improve the health and well-being of all our children. According to the introduction to this new advocacy tool, "PTA's success as an advocacy organization depends upon the active involvement of its members, and this publication will educate you about the children's issues being debated and elected officials' positions on them. As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy group in the nation, PTA has accomplished a great deal, and there's much more it can still do, but only with your help." To join and take action, go to:

<http://www.pta.org/2451.htm#2>

Online Safety Advocates Push President-Elect Obama to Step it Up for Kids

Remember our NYS PTA resolution that became a National PTA position? Well, here's something to wrap your advocacy around! A Washington D.C. non-profit organization, the Family Online Institute, is urging the new administration to appoint a national safety officer and invest \$100 million annually on education and research in order to step up efforts to protect children from crime, harassment and predators in cyberspace. While criticized for its focus on technology policy, we know that most current funding is for enforcement so this may be a new arena. To read all about it...

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/10/AR2008121001860_pf.html

<http://www.fosi.org/cms/>