

Genesee Valley PTA

Monroe County  
Federation of Teachers

NYS United Teachers

Monroe County  
Association of School  
Business Officials

Monroe County  
Council of School  
Superintendents

Monroe County  
School Boards  
Association

National Education  
Association of New  
York, Western New  
York Region

## NYS Budget Reform

For years people who work with public education have sought change in New York State's system of funding education. Although the total number of dollars is large, the allocation system is characterized by indecipherable formulas, special requirements that complicate access to funds, and annual changes in which programs are supported. The chronically late state budget sabotages thoughtful planning, forcing school districts to finalize their spending plans before they know final state aid numbers.

Education advocates want an open process that would produce an on-time budget with aid allocations that would be predictable, fair, and sustainable. Ten years ago a group called the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) filed a lawsuit against New York State claiming that children in New York City were not receiving their fair share of education aid. Last June the state's highest court decreed that New York State's funding for education in NYC did not meet the expectations of the State Constitution. The judge ruled that a new plan for allocating state aid to New York City needed to be developed by July 30 of this year or he would appoint a special master to decide a fair funding plan. The funding inequities identified in the lawsuit are not unique to New York City but exist throughout the state. Aware of this, in his decree the judge strongly urged the legislature to find a solution to improve the funding of education statewide.



*Jodi Siegle, Executive Director,  
Monroe County School Board  
Association*

How much money is needed to achieve adequate and equitable funding? Per pupil spending varies widely from district to district. Until this lawsuit no one had ever measured what education should cost. As programs are added or taken away in districts, or the state government tinkers with the existing formula, funding levels change. To address this question, CFE sponsored a Costing Out Study to determine what a good education should cost. Then the Governor's Commission for Education Reform arranged for Standard & Poor to study the same question. When combined with recent work by the Board of Regents, there are now three major reports to guide Albany in projecting how much additional funding is needed for the school districts of this state to provide comparable adequate programs statewide.

The budget is now late for the 20th year. Once again districts can only make informed guesses about their state aid for next year even as they finalize their spending plans for community votes. Each of the three Albany leaders - Governor George Pataki, Speaker of the Assembly Sheldon Silver, and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno - is taking a separate path to determine how to remedy the dilemma of the court case. While a joint committee of the Senate and Assembly has made some progress in agreeing to principles for reforming the budget timeline in the future, they are not applying their agreement to today's problem.

Every school district will be impacted by any new plan or process to distribute state aid to education. The CFE case has created an opportunity to solve a long-standing problem or create new ones. Let your state leaders know that solving the problem of funding education, both timing and dollars, must be the priority. If Albany fails to act for all, the court will act on behalf of some. The July 30 deadline is rapidly approaching. For your convenience, names and contact information for our Albany delegation is found on this web page at <http://www.mcsba.org/mcec/Legislators%20List.pdf>.





President Kathleen Donahue...

*For the 20th year in a row ...*



by Kathleen Donahue,  
President

Monroe County  
Federation of  
Teachers

For the 20th year in a row, the legislature of New York State has failed to provide an on time budget. This means that once again local school districts are being forced to formulate a budget based on the abstract rather than the concrete. Yet, the budgets have been formulated and will be voted on May 18th.

In many districts a small minority of the eligible voters turn out to cast their ballot on the budget. The reason for this is unclear, but it needs to be corrected. Voting is the cornerstone of our democratic system. It ensures our participation in the decision making process affecting the current as well as the future direction of our students. It indicates a sense of pride, commitment and involvement in our local community. And, most importantly, it is our civil duty.

Our task now is to work together to insure that people turn out to assist in the passage of these budgets. Educating voters to the benefits of supporting quality educational programs is critical to achieving this goal.

People need to understand that a “yes” vote sends the message that you are willing to support the excellent educational value provided by your schools, and that you encourage growth and initiatives. It says you will not allow a few to threaten a sound educational system. A “yes” vote means people will continue to be attracted to the community and the value of homes and businesses will remain stable. But most importantly, it says that you want to assure that students will grow into well-educated productive citizens of the future.

*Here’s how you can help to see that your budget gets the “yes” votes it deserves:*

- First, you need to be sure you are eligible to vote. You must be a US citizen, 18 years of age or older and have been a district resident for at least 30 days before the vote. In many school districts no pre-registration is required.
- Encourage your friends and family to vote yes. If 200 school employees vote yes and encourage their spouses to vote yes, that’s 400 yes votes. If they both encourage their parents to vote yes, that’s 1,200 yes votes, and so on.
- Go to the polling place together - car pool, walk, plan an activity for afterwards. This helps remind people of the day and time.
- Be an ambassador for your district. Make an effort to talk with 3-4 neighbors about all of the positive things that are taking place in your schools. Encourage them to join you in voting yes on the budget. Answer questions they may have, and if you can’t answer, direct them to someone who can. Follow up with them.
- Encourage colleagues to vote and support their schools. The more positive information you get out, the better people will understand what a powerful asset their schools are to the community.

The world is different today...so are our schools. They are continuously changing and being transformed. New technology and techniques are helping students reach higher standards in an increasingly fast paced world. Help meet these demands, and assist our students in achieving the education they so richly deserve. Vote “yes” on your local school budget May 18th.



...a force in our community

