

# This year's NYS education budget

Jody Siegle, Executive Director, Monroe County School Boards Association



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Genesee Valley  
PTA

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Federation  
of Teachers

NYS United  
Teachers

Monroe County  
Association  
of School  
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Council of  
School  
Superintendents

Monroe County  
School Boards  
Association

School  
Administrators  
Association  
of NYS

This year's state budget process was in some ways different and in some ways the same. Major changes were made to the funding formula, but the closed door discussions remained. New efforts to provide a transparent, predictable, and fair formula were successful. But sustainability remains a concern as the eagerness to meet all needs resulted in a 9% increase in state spending.

## FUNDING INCREASES

In recent years, determining aid for New York's school districts became increasingly disconnected from a formula. How much aid schools received was based on previously frozen dollar amounts that were later simply multiplied by percentage increases. We sought a return to a formula at every opportunity.

As the first step in bringing needed change, NYS has now moved from an erratic and influence-driven education funding system to one based on a relatively simple foundation formula. The formula is designed to pump money into needy districts and to help high tax districts control property tax increases. The budget increases school aid by \$1.76 billion; all districts will receive an increase of at least 3% and most will receive more.

## ACCOUNTABILITY MANDATES

To ensure that all this new funding is used to improve education, districts receiving a 10% increase or \$15 million in new Foundation Aid—and who have had a school identified by NCLB as needing improvement—must develop Contracts for Excellence (C4E). These districts must spend their Foundation Aid above 3% on specific new programs (smaller class size, longer school day or year, improved teacher and principal quality, middle and high school restructuring, full-day kindergarten, and/or pre-kindergarten), and they must have a plan to evaluate the resulting changes.

About 55 districts, including 5 in Monroe County, will need to develop C4Es. Because of the limited time for planning new initiatives, this first year up to 25% of this

new money may be used to maintain preexisting programs from the specified list.

This budget also directed the Board of Regents and Commissioner of Education to take a number of actions:

- \* Identify a corps of experienced superintendents and teachers as Distinguished Educators who will be assigned to work directly with struggling districts.
- \* Expand the identification criteria so that up to 5% of schools will be identified for reorganization and restructuring each year as Schools Under Registration review (SURR). Develop plans to help the identified schools improve.
- \* Develop a Growth Model assessment program to replace the current state testing program (subject, of course, to federal approval).
- \* Develop new reports to help parents and districts understand state test results.

There are also new public reporting requirements. School leadership and school district progress report cards, yet to be developed, will be attached to the school budget information prior to the annual budget vote.

## CHARTER SCHOOL INCREASE

The budget provides approval, but not funding, for an additional 100 charter schools, 50 of which will be located in NYC. Charter schools will be required to make "good faith" efforts to attract students with disabilities and Limited English Proficiency. Transition aid, to help districts hurt by paying for charter schools, was increased. Rochester will be eligible for this aid.

Approval of charter schools now requires a public hearing, although how input from that hearing should be used is not specified. If more than 5% of a district's students already attend charter schools, the approval of additional schools will require more justification. New charter schools approved on or after March 15 cannot open until September of the following year so that local districts can plan for the changes. Staff in charter schools approved after July 1 that serve more than 250 students in their first two years must be unionized.

## Top Ten Reasons to Vote on May 15



Judy Wadsworth

with thanks to David Letterman for the idea

by Judy Wadsworth, Assistant to Executive Director, Monroe County School Boards Association

### 10. Because you can:

In many nations of the world, and in most states of our union, citizens do not have the right to vote on the spending plans developed by their school districts.

### 9. Because you should:

Since all of us have the right and responsibility to vote on our district budgets, you too are accountable for exercising your civic duty.

### 8. Because others will:

There are some folks in every school district who vote for reasons other than our own reasons. By not voting, we allow their side to win.

### 7. Because you set an example:

The students we serve notice whether or not the adults in their lives exercise their civic responsibilities. We set an example whether or not we vote.

### 6. Because you show respect for what educators do:

Working with all the students that show up is a very difficult challenge. By taking the time to vote, you acknowledge this challenge.

### 5. Because this is when you help select your school board members:

Your school board members are elected concurrently with the budget vote. School boards set policy and goals for your district and select your district's superintendent. They represent your educational interests.

### 4. Because you control public education:

You get to decide each year on the quantity and quality of educational programs and services provided in your community.

### 3. Because your response is needed:

Your school board has developed a spending plan based on input from district employees and community members of budget advisory committees. These folks spent hundreds of hours considering options and making spending decisions for your consideration. Respond by voting.

### 2. Because public education matters:

Our public schools educate by far the greatest number of our next generation—those to whom we will be turning over the reins of government and business, and those who will be caring for our generation as we get older.

### 1. Because your community and its children depend on you:

The folk wisdom that "it takes a whole community to raise a child" fits here. You share the responsibility to see that all children are educated. While you may not be actually involved with what occurs in classrooms, you can make your opinion known on what happens there by voting.

*MCSBA President Frank Muscato, Vice President Margie Vandenberg, and Executive Director Jody Siegle contributed to this list.*

Monroe County Education Coalition

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