



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Hinchey Leads Rally to Call for Full Funding of Rural and Upstate Schools, Oppose Cuts to Education Funding

OFFICE OF NYS SENATOR MICHELLE HINCHEY March 22, 2024



Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha alongside NYSUT Presidents and Board Members, local teachers, parents, and Superintendents from Columbia, Dutchess, Greene and Ulster counties.

Senator Michelle Hinchey, Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha, NYSUT Leaders, Teachers, Superintendents from Columbia, Dutchess, Greene and Ulster Form United Front for Full and Fair School Funding

**KINGSTON, NY** – As State lawmakers enter the final weeks of budget negotiations, Senator Michelle Hinchey led a rally in partnership with Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), parents and superintendents from schools across

the 41st Senate District to call for equitable public school funding amid \$419 million in cuts proposed in the [FY'25 Executive Budget](#), which would negatively affect all of the state's nearly 700 school districts.

More than half of these cuts are targeted at districts classified as High Needs and would disproportionately impact small rural communities, exacerbating existing inequalities in educational resources. The Mid-Hudson region stands out as the most affected area [compared](#) to other regions in the state, facing a \$31 million reduction (4.2%) in total funding. In Hinchey's Senate District alone, these proposed cuts would translate to a loss of over \$25.7 million.

In response, both the Senate and Assembly one-house budget proposals rejected all cuts to education funding. The Senate one-house restores the 'hold harmless' provision, which would ensure school districts receive no less funding than the previous year. The Senate one-house also proposes \$747 million in total school aid, guaranteeing a minimum 3% increase for all districts and initiating a comprehensive review of the Foundation Aid formula to reevaluate how New York funds its public schools.

Lawmakers rallied in solidarity with local teachers representing Germantown, Highland, Hudson, Kingston, New Paltz, Poughkeepsie, Rondout Valley, Wallkill, and Woodstock School Districts. School officials from Columbia County included Taconic Hills Superintendent Lynnette Brunger and New Lebanon Superintendent Andrew Kourt. Representing Dutchess County, Red Hook High School Principal Kyle Roddey. From Greene County, Greenville Superintendent Michael Bennett. From Ulster County, Saugerties Superintendent Daniel Erceg, Onteora Superintendent Victoria McLaren and Board of Education Members, Margaretville Superintendent Michelle Osterhoudt, Margaretville Board of Education President Doris Warner, Highland Superintendent Joel Freer, New Paltz Superintendent

Stephen Gratto, and Marlboro Middle School Principal Debra Clinton.

NYSUT Presidents included Kevin Rizzo, President of the Highland Teachers' Association; Paulette Easterlin, President of New Paltz United Teachers; LeeAnn Pazoga, President of the Wallkill Teachers' Association; Rob McDonough, President of the Rondout Valley Federation; Kim Popken, President of the Poughkeepsie Public School Teachers' Association, and Kerry Sheehy, President of Ulster BOCES. Board Members included Melissa Tierney representing ED-13; Sparrow Tobin, Board Member and HVALF President; NYSUT At-Large Board Member Kim McEvoy, and Patrick McCarthy, President of the NYSUT Retiree Council 13 Chapter.

**Senator Michelle Hinchey said,** “Ensuring every child in New York State has equitable access to a quality public education means fully funding our schools. This is a right all children and families across our state deserve, and yet, the proposed abrupt changes to the school funding formula and subsequent detrimental cuts to education funding this year undermine this right. Our rural and Mid-Hudson Valley schools face the biggest cuts in the entire state; these are districts that have historically received inadequate Foundation Aid and cannot absorb the detrimental losses proposed without cutting curriculum or laying off staff. Out of 31 school districts in my district, all but six of them would face drastic cuts in funding, forcing them to make these decisions imminently. I’m proud that our Senate one-house not only rejects all cuts to education, but proposes an increase for SD-41 schools. I will fight to deliver the funding our rural and upstate schools deserve and hold the line against these outrageously proposed cuts.”

**Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha said,** “Just one year after we fully funded the Foundation Aid formula, the Governor proposes a \$454 million cut for school aid, which is going to result in significant cuts for many school districts, including four in my Assembly district. And these cuts are being proposed at a time when the economy is growing, there’s billions of

dollars in reserves, corporations are making record profits, and we have 17,500 new millionaires in the state. The Assembly rejects the Governor's cuts, asks the wealthy to pay a tiny bit more in their fair share, and proposes to invest in our schools with, among other things, a \$1.8 billion increase in school aid and a new \$2 billion Smart School Bond Act that can be used towards electric buses. Whether we want to protect the 1% or invest in our teachers and students is a choice this year's budget must make."

**Assemblymember Didi Barrett said,** "As an Assemblymember representing a largely rural district, I have long advocated for modernizing the Foundation Aid formula, which hasn't been changed since 2008. That said, the proposed formula and elimination of the 'hold harmless' provision would have had a devastating impact on most of the schools in my district — with some districts facing proposed cuts of more than 30%. I pushed back hard against these proposed cuts, and I am pleased that the Assembly's one-house budget proposal fully funds Foundation Aid. As budget negotiations continue, I will fight to ensure Hudson Valley public schools get the appropriate funding and support they need."

**NYSUT President Melinda Person said,** "Our students and educators deserve better than the executive budget's education proposals. We have visited districts across the state, from Long Island to Western New York, the North Country to the Hudson Valley, to show the devastating impacts these cuts would have on our communities. We thank our allies in both houses of the Legislature who have rejected these short-sighted cuts, and we are working with them to ensure the final state budget includes the full funding that was promised."

**NYSUT Board Member Melissa Servant said,** "Whenever anyone thinks of the Hudson Valley, they picture the outdoors, wide open spaces for hiking and climbing and the Hudson River with all of the beautiful sunsets. What they don't picture are public schools in need. They don't picture marginalized populations of students needing support in their public schools."

They don't picture public school faculty and staff working beyond their capacity to attempt to meet the needs of our students. Governor Hochul's budget directly impacts all schools in the Hudson Valley. Our teachers and students deserve to have fully funded programs and so much more."

**Randall W. Squier, Superintendent of Schools, Coxsackie-Athens Central School District, said,** "Maintaining the 'save harmless' formula and increasing foundation aid by at least 3% for all schools, including rural districts like Coxsackie-Athens, is not just about fairness; it's about ensuring every student has access to a quality education, regardless of their zip code. Senator Michelle Hinchey's steadfast advocacy against the proposed cuts to education is commendable. With her support, we can ensure that rural districts like Coxsackie-Athens receive the funding they need to maintain essential programs and support ALL students to be successful."

**Lynnette Brunger, Superintendent of Schools, Taconic Hills Central School District, said,** "Taconic Hills is projected to receive one of the highest reductions in Foundation aid amid Columbia County and New York State. The reductions to Taconic Hills are currently proposed to be \$2,766,342, which is 7% of our annual school budget. This proposed loss of Foundation Aid would profoundly impact our school district, significantly hindering our capacity to cater to the needs of our students. It could potentially lead to reductions in programming, staffing, athletics and enrichment opportunities. At the District's recent meeting with Senator Hinchey, it became evident that she and her team are essential advocates for all school districts significantly impacted by the Governor's proposal. We greatly appreciate Senator Hinchey's support during this time of uncertainty."

**Michael Wetherbee, Superintendent of Schools, Cairo-Durham Central School District, said,** "I commend Senator Hinchey for defending our schools against the Governor's draconian

proposed cuts to State Foundation Aid. These cuts would directly harm the Cairo-Durham Central School District, ultimately setting the students, staff, and district back from the remarkable progress achieved following the Covid-19 pandemic. With almost \$1 million less in aid, our district stands to lose instructional coaches, mental health services, and partnerships providing a counselor from Greene County Mental Health and Twin County Recovery Services. The proposed deficit would also increase class sizes and force a reduction in UPK classes, academic intervention services, and high school electives. We appreciate Senator Hinchey's advocacy and hope for a final budget resolution that provides essential funding for our district."

**Michelle Osterhoudt, Superintendent of Schools, Margaretville Central School District** said, "Rural communities struggle due to remoteness of services and lack of opportunity, and we often feel like we are forgotten—thank you, Senator Hinchey, and to our local state legislators for advocating for the little guy! I'm grateful that both the Senate and the Assembly are advocating for the restoration of Save Harmless, and increased Foundation Aid of 3%. There is no greater investment than in our children. It is appreciated that both the Senate and Assembly recognize this. Governor Hochul's proposal is unfair to our school children. Despite ARP funding dropping off, many school districts responsibly budgeted for SEL and mental health services started with ARP funding. For Governor Hochul to 'pull the rug' out from under us is an affront to the hard work we do as educators to advocate for the social and emotional supports for the children in our care."

**Dr. Sal DeAngelo, Superintendent of Schools, Chatham Central School District**, said, "While we certainly recognize the need to fix the state aid formula, the abrupt and drastic manner in which it is being done is of deep concern and will quickly lead to reduced opportunities for students in NY. Taking a more measured approach over time would allow schools to better adjust to changes in state aid and potentially avoid cuts to the many programs our

communities hold dear. We are grateful and supportive of Senator Hinchey's for her strong leadership and advocacy in fighting these cuts on behalf of the rural districts in the State."

**Andrew M. Kourt, Superintendent of Schools, New Lebanon Central School District, said,**

"Students and families are needing more support and services than ever before. In New Lebanon CSD we have added more special education programs to meet needs, provided more mental health supports and increased our ELL services for students. All of these supports for children come at a cost and have increased our school budget. Kids and families need us, and this is not the time to be reducing school budgets but we must invest in our children and give them what they need and deserve. We thank Senator Hinchey for her fierce advocacy on behalf of New Lebanon Central School District."

**Kevin Castle, Superintendent of Schools, Wallkill Central School District, said,** "I would like to thank Senator Hinchey and the Senate for their one house budget proposal, including but not limited to, restoring hold harmless, providing a minimum Foundation Aid increase of 3%, allocating money to SED to study changes to the Foundation Aid formula and funding the expansion of universal school meals. These proposals alone would significantly help Wallkill students and students in NYS."

**Michael Bennett, Superintendent of Schools, Greenville Central School District, said,** "At a time when the Governor is asking schools to provide reading support for our students (the science of reading initiative) and to address the mental health concerns of our students, the proposed cuts force the schools to cut the very people that would be providing those services. Schools need to be provided the funding they need to support the students they serve."

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