



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Klein & Cardinal Egan Rally with Religious Leaders for State Funds for Schools

JEFFREY D. KLEIN March 13, 2009

Parents and Students Voice Their Concern

BRONX, NY-Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), joined by His Eminence Edward Cardinal Egan, his senate colleagues, religious leaders from the Jewish, Lutheran, and Greek Orthodox communities, banded together with concerned parents and students to oppose cuts to state funding for religious and independent schools. The state's 2008-09 enacted state budget and Governor Paterson's 2009-10 proposed budget, in addition to reducing the appropriation for the program, limit the state's liability for reimbursement under the program to 92 %, putting more than \$18 million at stake.

The Mandated Services Reimbursement (MSR) program, enacted in 1974, requires the state to reimburse independent and religious schools for 100% their actual costs in providing state services, including administering state tests and reporting basic educational data. In response to the proposed cuts, Senator Suzi Oppenheimer, Chair of the Senate Education Committee has introduced S.2998, co-sponsored by Senators Klein, Johnson, Foley, and Aubertine, to honor the state's obligation.

Relative to public schools the state typically shortchanges independent schools which educate 15% of New York State students (20% in NYC) but only get 1% of state education funding.

In general, MSR monies comprises about 15% of the average school's budget. Some schools may be as high as 20%.

"A 15% cut out of the budget is a lot of brownie dough for bake sales," said Klein.

Over its 35-year history, the MRS program has experienced a number of deficiencies, in some cases due to the state's poor fiscal climate. In every case, however, those deficiencies were eventually made whole when the economy permitted doing so. After receiving e-mails and letters from 10,000 New Yorkers, Governor Paterson reversed his decision to eliminate the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP) program for religious and independent schools, which would've cost schools \$55 million.

This cut was on top of last year's 12 percent - \$17 million cut. Public schools were exempt from last year's "across the board" cuts 44 % - a total of \$62 million - to the MSR program. While the Governor's amended budget does not restore funds to the MSR program, the administration has expressed willingness to negotiate a restoration of program funds.

"I am pleased to join with my fellow Senators and Cardinal Egan in support of this important legislation. As the Chair of the Senate Education Committee I have met with many schools who will be affected by the loss of these important funds and I am working hard to ensure they get them back," added Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Westchester)

"Honoring this state's obligation to the 500,000 children attending independent and religious schools is not only the right thing to do, it is also what makes the most economic sense," said Senator Craig M. Johnson (D-Nassau). "We teach our children to keep their word and honor

their commitments. We must ensure that New York does the same by restoring this critically important funding in the upcoming budget."

The state's independent and religious schools provide significant savings to state taxpayers by virtue of educating nearly a half million of New York's children. A reduction in MSR will be devastating to the already fragile budgets of the vast majority of these schools. Not only have hundreds of these schools closed over the years, more are closing at the end of the current school year. School closings only exacerbates the fiscal stress on the state budget as well as the burden faced by property tax payers. It is in the state's interest, at least financially, to maintain its long standing commitment to reimburse these schools for their state-mandated expenses.

To this day, no reimbursement has been provided to schools for their CAP expenses in the 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2007-08. Additionally, the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school year expenses for CAP were under-funded by some \$25 million.

"A promise is a promise. It is simply unconscionable for the state to cut promised funds to New York's non-public schools. Without even this little government funding, many schools will simply close. That will force children into public schools at an infinitely greater cost," David G. Greenfield Executive Vice President Sephardic Community Federation.

MSR funds are absolutely necessary for the function of religious and independent schools. For example, the Archdiocese of New York receives about \$325 per student compared to about \$17,000 per public school student. In addition to MSR, Catholic schools receive \$58.25/student a year for textbooks, \$6.25/student for library materials, \$14/student for computer software, and \$12.24/student for computer hardware.

"As a state, we've made a commitment to education and that includes religious and independent schools," said Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine, (D-Cape Vincent). "In the long run, these schools save taxpayer's money and give more than half a million students statewide a quality education. We must keep our word and fully reimburse these schools in the upcoming budget for mandated costs."

"As our great state faces unprecedented challenges, it is essential that we honor our responsibility to provide the quality education our children deserve. I am privileged to work with Cardinal Eagan and leaders representing our diverse faith-based communities to advocate for the resources our schools so sorely need and fight for a brighter future for students throughout New York State," added Senator Brian Foley (D-Blue Point) who serves on the education committee.