



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Amedore

Schenectady Weekend Backpack Partnership Receives \$50,000 Grant through Efforts of Amedore, Tedisco

GEORGE AMEDORE May 31, 2017



Through the efforts of New York State Senators George Amedore and Jim Tedisco, a \$50,000 grant was secured in the state budget to help build the capacity of the Schenectady Weekend Backpack Partnership to serve other school districts in Schenectady County.

The grant will help the community partners that fund and operate the partnership expand beyond the current 1,000 students being served in the City of Schenectady to serve students in other Schenectady County school districts who show signs of food insecurity.

The Weekend Backpack Partnership helps children and families meet their weekend nutritional needs by providing children with food to take home on Friday afternoons. Between lunchtime on Friday and breakfast on Monday, many Schenectady schoolchildren are unsure of where their next full meal will come from, or even if there will be a meal. Although the federal school breakfast and lunch program helps students during the week, many students are at risk of hunger on weekends. These students typically have lower grades and higher rates of absenteeism, and often exhibit behavioral problems as well.

“The Weekend Backpack Partnership provides vital assistance to the families of 1,000 Schenectady City School District children, but we know that the need across the county is so much greater,” said Denise Gonick, president and CEO of MVP Health Care, one of the partnership’s leading corporate partners. “Senators Tedisco and Amedore and Assemblyman Santabarbara understand that need and the positive impact this program is having on school performance for participating children. The funding they secured will help ensure that more families can be served in the coming school year, and we are very grateful for their support.”

“For several years now, the members of this partnership have supported this program financially, with help from community donors,” said Michael J. Castellana, president and CEO of SEFCU, another leading corporate partner. “With this new funding from New York State, the Weekend Backpack Partnership becomes a true public/private partnership. This investment will go a long way in helping us serve children in need in Schenectady County.”

"All the evidence points to the fact that children who have a full stomach are more likely to pay attention and learn better in school. The expansion of the successful Schenectady Weekend Backpack Partnership into more schools in Schenectady County will give more

children and families the peace of mind that they will have access to healthy meals in the next school year. As the Chairman of the Senate Social Services Committee, I was pleased to be one of the driving forces for obtaining \$50,000 in state funding in this year's budget to help expand the Schenectady Weekend Backpack Partnership county wide and make it a model for other areas across the state," said Senator Jim Tedisco.

Senator George Amedore said, "The Weekend Backpack Program has had such a positive impact in our community, with proven results that have benefited our students with food insecurity and hunger issues. Funding this program was one of my top priorities in this year's budget, and I'm proud to secure this grant that will help sustain the program and hopefully allow it to grow and expand into other school districts."

The continued improvements in academic achievement and attendance show that ensuring children have nutritious food to eat over the weekend has a significant impact on their performance at school. During the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 88 percent of students in the program improved or maintained their academic performance from the previous school year, compared to 84 percent of students who didn't participate. Also, their attendance throughout the school year was six percent higher than that of non-participating students.

The partnership is currently collecting information about the level of need in other Schenectady County school districts in order to help those districts institute the program for their students. With the new funding, the partnership hopes to seed programs in interested districts to get them started.

The City Mission of Schenectady will scale up its volunteer operation to pack and deliver the

additional food bags to the new districts that decide to participate, as it does for the Schenectady City School District. The Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York will lead the outreach to suburban and rural districts to determine interest and will increase the amount of food it purchases for the weekly distributions to children.

In order to increase the funds raised to help serve the school districts, the Schenectady Foundation will establish a county-wide program donation portal and will also promote the program through marketing efforts.

Corporate partners such as MVP Health Care and SEFCU will continue to provide overall leadership and organizational support and funding for the partnership.

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