



*A Special Message from*  
**ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS**  
New York State Senator, 35th District  
Senate Democratic Leader



Dear Friend;

As a former public school teacher who attended public schools, sent her children to public schools, and has grandchildren in public schools, I am invested in our public schools.

Every child in New York State has the right to a quality education, and our State has a moral and Constitutional obligation to protect that right. Unfortunately, education has become a battleground issue in the State Legislature, and all too often the casualties are our students and teachers.

This year's State budget included changes to education policy, which I did not support, that will overburden our kids with standardized tests and force schools district to choose between unreasonable evaluation requirements and state financial support.

To address the legitimate concerns raised by parents, educators and students, my colleagues in the Senate Democratic Conference and I introduced a legislative package of bills that, if passed, will implement reasonable evaluation systems, ensure our schools are appropriately funded, and truly improve the educational outcomes of our students.

Most importantly, this package of bills will ensure every New York student has access to a high quality education. We must all remember that our schools are the foundation for our state's future economic stability and prosperity.

Included in the education package are bills that will:

- **Implement an advisory council** involving all stakeholders to review “Annual Professional Performance Review Plans” and determine best practices.

- **Improve teacher evaluations** and make them more fair by restoring use of the locally negotiated “student achievement metric,” which more fairly assesses children who are above grade-level as well as students with special needs.
- **Repeal a provision** that allows the State to withhold additional school aid from districts should they not have their “Annual Professional Performance Review Plans” approved by the Commissioner of Education by November 15, 2015.
- **Create an Education Infrastructure Bank** to rebuild crumbling public schools across New York State (and help create good local jobs) by investing \$682 million from bank settlement funds paid to the State for needs associated with health and safety, accessibility, physical capacity and school construction projects. This essential investment was left out of the enacted 2015 State Budget.
- **Remove an unfunded mandate** on our schools by making the use of independent, outside evaluators optional instead of required.
- Establish the “**Community Schools Grant Program**” to fund community schools that offer wraparound social services to create high quality, culturally relevant curriculum, health, social and emotional services in high needs communities, and then share the best practices across the state and nation.
- Analyze the distribution and use of taxpayer funds associated with educational testing, curriculum building, graduation requirements and other essential components to **developing effective education policy**.

**We have an opportunity before this legislative session ends to make these important changes.**

**As we saw with the Common Core, rushed implementation of any program or policy is not an effective means of achieving the overall goal: to provide all students, regardless of their zip code, the same educational opportunity.**

For more information on these bills and other measures, please visit [my website](#).

Sincerely,

*Andrea Stewart-Cousins*  
*New York State Senator, 35th District*  
*Senate Democratic Leader*

