



SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 2008/2009 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

PRIORITIES

1. Say Yes to Education

This Initiative will drive economic development and educational reform. Syracuse seeks to be the state demonstration site for Say Yes to Education. The Initiative offers to all city School District graduates (who are at least three year residents) tuition, books, and fee waivers at 25 private schools and hopefully 67 SUNY/CUNY schools. The cost of the private college tuition is being borne by the individual schools through their commitment to the Higher Education Compact. The cost of the state schools is being sought from the state. The amount is relatively small (\$700K in 2009-2010 to \$3 million in 12 years) as most students, due to the heavy concentration of poverty, receive significant aid.

In a four-year phase-in, significant supports (tutoring, after school programming, summer school) are being built into the schedule for all students beginning in Kindergarten to prepare them for college. The costs of these supports will be built into the District operating budget once the Contract for Excellence (CFE) is fully funded.

2. Pre-K Funding and Flexibility

The District needs flexibility to use current funding to provide full-day pre-kindergarten programming for all four year olds and to fund three year olds in integrated pre-k classes. Currently, approximately 1000 of the 1600 students enter kindergarten with a pre-k experience, but only 336 have had a full-day pre-k experience. New pre-k regulations allow funding for only four year olds, making it difficult to maintain long-standing integrated programs for preschoolers (both three and four year olds). The goal should be that all preschoolers have a full-day pre-k experience as studies have shown that the increased graduation rate is directly linked to full-day pre-k experiences. This requires more money and more flexibility to use current allocations.

3. Increased State Aid Formula

The Syracuse City School District reduced over 100 positions in the past two years despite a new state aid formula. To help ensure full funding the state aid formula needs to be adjusted in the following ways: 1) continue full funding of Contract for Excellence decision 2) remove the floor on the poverty index 3) allow for greater flexibility with Contract for Excellence funds 4) eliminate the 3 percent increase guarantee to all districts.

4. State Aid Payments Need to be Accelerated

Currently, the District borrows \$75 million for cash flow purposes which results in approximately \$2 million in borrowing fees. This occurs because the bulk of state aid is received in March, after a majority of the year's expenditures have already been incurred. Adjustments should be made for Syracuse or the Big 4 to receive the state aid at the beginning of the school year.

5. Maximum Cost Allowance/Construction

The maximum cost allowance needs to be adjusted upward. The city was approved for the first of a four phase \$1 billion school renovation plan. The first phase calls for \$180 million of which only approximately \$130 million is aidable, leaving approximately \$50 million for local share or a severe reduction in project scope. In addition, more funding is needed for incentives beyond normal building aid for procuring and installing materials and equipment that promote "Green" buildings. Phase 2 legislation must be written differently to allow "at risk" program management.

6. Construction of Health Care and Mental Health Clinics

Article 28 and Article 31

As the renovations of the first seven schools commence, a health clinic and/or mental health clinic in each of these facilities is necessary to meet the needs of our student population. However, the cost for approximately 2000 square feet is \$400,000, which is not aidable. We are requesting building aid for the mental health and/or health clinics up to 2000 square feet in three of the seven as we have four in existence.

7. Teacher Recruitment and Training

The District seeks to be the first to implement an Urban Teacher Calendar. This new calendar would include 20 additional days (five hours/day) in the summer to be used for both professional development and direct student instruction. Our teachers would become the best trained and higher paid urban educators. The cost is approximately \$5 million. In addition, we are looking for incentives (i.e. loan forgiveness, home tax relief, stipends) to recruit and retain minority staff and those certified in Math, Science, Technology, ESL, and Foreign Language.

8. Testing and Assessment

State level testing in Grades 3 – 8 as well as Regents examinations currently occur in November, January, February, March, May, and June. Additionally, there is mandated testing for students with special needs (NYSAA) and English Language Learners (NYSESLAT) that occurs throughout the school year. The impact on large districts, including the time taken for testing students and the time necessary for scoring the examinations, is expensive, causes a loss of instructional time, and places a large time constraint on administrative and teaching personnel. We would strongly advocate that all state testing occur on a "Regents like" schedule: all students would only be tested twice a year (in January and June). In addition, ESL students' performance needs to be counted toward **District** accountability after two full years of uninterrupted instruction and toward individual **building** accountability only after three full years of uninterrupted instruction.

9. IDEA (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*)

In 1975, Congress enacted the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) to ensure that all individuals receive an equitable and high quality educational program. Since the enactment in 1975, Congress has vowed repeatedly to fulfill its promise of funding 40 percent of the additional cost per student, but its current average is between 17 and 18 percent. IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 but funding did not change significantly. The proposed solutions are as follows:

- Make new IDEA funding mandatory while keeping the base discretionary.
- Increase the federal contribution from 17 percent to 40 percent.
- Accomplish full funding by 2012, meeting the commitment of the 2004 IDEA Reauthorization.
- Require states to maintain their level of financial support for special education.

c: U.S. Senator Charles Schumer
 U. S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
 Congressman James T. Walsh
 Senator John A. DeFrancisco
 Senator David Valesky
 Assemblywoman Joan Christensen
 Assemblyman William B. Magnarelli
 County Executive Joanne M. Mahoney
 Mayor Matthew Driscoll
 Common Councilors
 Richard P. Mills, Commissioner of Education
 Board of Education