

Restore financial aid to school districts at 2009 funding

By James D. Hoffman, Commentary

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Gov. Andrew Cuomo's tax relief panel recently made a recommendation to freeze property taxes for the next two years. The cost of this freeze is approximately \$2 billion.

However, schools and municipalities have been impatiently waiting for mandate relief since the property tax cap was instituted in 2010. There is no relief from the heavy burden all schools and local governments face from unfunded mandates.

Meanwhile, we are in the fifth year of aid reduced from the amount schools received years ago. My own district, Averill Park, is receiving approximately what it received in state aid 10 years ago.

Yet, mandates have flourished.

In 2007, inequities in school funding resulted in a new aid package for schools to help those in need to receive the funding necessary to provide for an adequate education for all children. Not only are those increases frozen until at least 2016 (I expect it to be postponed then as well), but an additional \$2 billion was taken from school funding due to the financial crisis in 2008-09.

Our crisis must be over if the governor is able to give \$2 billion in tax relief. Schools still have not had all their aid restored and continue to see reductions of \$1.6 billion each year.

Of course, in an election year, you get no political points for restoring money that is required. Funds that could be used to restore school aid are instead being funneled to a politically expedient area.

At this point, even the wealthiest districts in the Capital Region have lost large numbers of staff and faculty. Districts, large and small, wealthy and poor, need support and that can only come from the governor and the Legislature.

They should do the right thing and restore state aid to where it was in 2009.

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