

Unfunded Mandates

Dear Elected Representative,

As parents and members of the Lower Westchester Education Consortium, we are deeply concerned that unfunded mandates are depleting our school districts' resources. Our utmost priority is our children's well being and future. Access to a high quality education is vital. However, the nation's protracted economic slump has led to reductions in property tax revenues, cuts in state funding, and increases in tax certiorari claims. We are struggling to maintain the quality of our academic programming in the face of diminishing resources.

The New York State government has exacerbated this challenging situation by imposing numerous mandates on our school districts without providing the funding necessary to implement these mandates. This practice has created an impossible situation for our schools and placed the future of our education system in jeopardy. Schools have been forced to cut critical academic programs – programs that school board members, administrators, educators, parents, and children deem beneficial – in order to fund mandates that we consider unnecessary, inefficient, and outdated. The State's unfair practice of imposing unfunded mandates on our schools is adversely affecting our children.

To alleviate the financial burden on our schools and protect our educational programs, we respectfully request that New York State government officials:

- **Refrain from imposing new mandates** on our school districts.
- **Revisit current mandates** – with input from local superintendents – to determine which mandates may be eliminated.
- **Provide funding** for mandates that the State deems essential.
- **Fulfill promises to provide mandate relief** after passage of the property tax cap.

We acknowledge the importance of the APPR review; however, we are concerned the process and associated data collection are siphoning funds from academic programs. School districts should not be expected to incur the expense of APPR and other administrative mandates, such as internal auditing, without relief from the State. Schools should be focusing their limited resources on educating our children.

In addition, mandates that are excessive are draining our resources. Mandates that prevent school districts from operating efficiently are unreasonable. For example, the Wickes Law prevents school districts from hiring a general contractor for construction projects, and must hire separate companies for every facet of a job, which drives up the cost. In addition, school districts are not allowed to place money in reserve for rising teacher pension costs.

To compete in the increasingly complex global economy, our children require a superior education. At a time when technological innovation and higher academic standards necessitate increased investment in instructional materials, we cannot afford to divert funds to outdated, superfluous, and inefficient mandates. We implore you to rectify this situation promptly for the future of our children, our State and our nation.

Respectfully,