



A D V O C A C Y T O O L K I T

School districts across New York have made devastating cuts to educational programs as they adjust to rising costs that are outpacing revenue.

For some districts, that has meant lost jobs and reductions in the number of class sections, sports, extracurricular offerings, after-school clubs and bus runs, enrichment opportunities, early learning programs, advanced courses, student support services, and more. In fact, many schools now face the very real threat of educational insolvency, when they will no longer be able to provide the minimum requirements for students under New York State Education Department guidelines.

Continued reductions are not a viable long-term solution to fiscal challenges when today's students and teachers must meet higher performance standards than those for any previous generation. **This trend of reductions cannot continue without threatening the quality—and equality—of the education available to all students.**

Community advocates must speak up *now*, on behalf of their students and their schools, or risk losing the high level of local public education that they've come to expect. **Thank you for being an advocate who stands up for our schools.**

*Advocates
give a voice to
the issues, people
and principles
they care about.*

*Your voice
can make a
difference!*

How can I make a difference for students?

Concerned citizens often wonder what they can do to help their local students and schools.

The answer: Complete one or more of the items on the Advocacy Checklist below. Then encourage friends and family to do the same.

Advocacy Checklist

➤ Empower yourself

- Choose an issue affecting your local schools and learn about that issue (*Action Step #1*).
- Hone and deliver a “laser talk” to someone about the issue you chose (*Action Step #2*).

➤ Advocate with your legislators

- Send a letter or email to local legislators. Use Twitter and Facebook, too. (*Action Step #3*).
- Establish a relationship with legislators’ aides (*Action Step #4*).
- Schedule face-to-face meetings with legislators, and ask them to take a leadership role on your selected issue (*Action Step #5*).
- Invite legislators to special events at schools.
- Ask questions at legislators’ town hall meetings.

➤ Advocate through the media

- Write a letter to the editor and send your published letter to local legislators.
- Copy editorials or newspaper articles about your issue and send them to local legislators.

➤ Advocate in the community

- Organize a letter-writing campaign.
- Speak to a local Community group.
- Participate in a forum on your selected issue.
- Use social media to spread the word about what you’re advocating for:
 - Update your Facebook or Twitter status with a key point from your “laser talk.”
 - Share links to relevant news articles or to your school district website.
 - Invite people to participate in events that are related to your selected issue.
 - Follow legislators’ social media accounts. Use social media to connect with legislators.

How can I have a good discussion with a legislator?

Follow these tips to engage in productive back-and-forth discussions with legislators, even when you don’t agree on the issues.

- **Be brief.** Stick to your key points, and legislators will appreciate your respect for their busy schedules.
- **Be respectful, but also confident and direct.** A thoughtful discussion gives both sides an opportunity to come to an agreement, while a divisive argument makes both sides just want to win. So keep it civil while standing up for your beliefs.
- **Be clear and specific.** Let legislators know exactly what you want them to do (e.g., vote in favor of a bill, sponsor legislation) in a way that requires them to give you a “yes” or “no” response.
- **Be accurate.** Research your issue so you can answer legislators’ questions. Promise to follow up on any question for which you don’t immediately have an answer.
- **Be honest about your concerns.** Paint the real picture of your situation, even if it is scary. Share the ramifications for your community’s schools and children. Use personal or compelling stories and facts.
- **Be timely and persistent.** If an issue has a deadline, make sure you give legislators enough time to respond to the issue. Regular reminders about the importance of the issue from multiple advocates can increase the likelihood that legislators will pay attention to the issue.

How can I be an advocate for my local schools?

Action Step #1

Learn about the key issues we need our legislators to address.

➤ **Get Rid of the Entire Gap Elimination Adjustment in the 2016-17 State Budget**

Challenge: The Gap Elimination Adjustment was introduced in 2010 as a way for state government to close its \$10 billion budget deficit. It did so by spreading the funding shortfall around to all school districts through a gimmicky deduction to the overall Foundation Aid entitled to schools. New York schools have lost more than \$10 billion in promised school aid because of the GEA (CNYSBA school districts alone have lost well over \$600 million) — in effect, NYS balanced its budget on the backs of public education.

Despite whittling away at the GEA, \$434 million remains. In his Executive Budget proposal the Governor devoted only \$189 to GEA restoration, leaving \$245 million to be deducted from state aid checks for yet another year. Many CNYSBA districts will still have large amounts of badly need funding withheld if GEA does not totally go away this year. Why would this absurd deficit cutting gimmick be maintained when there is no longer a state budget gap to eliminate? It makes no sense, and it hurts our children, schools & communities.

Solution: It's very simple...GEA MUST BE COMPLETELY ELIMINATED THIS YEAR in the 2016-17 state budget. The state budget deficit that prompted the GEA is LONG GONE...in fact, once again this year the state budget will have a surplus...so why does the GEA still exist?

➤ **Provide \$880 million in Improved Foundation Aid in the 2016-17 State Budget**

Challenge: The Executive Budget only calls for a meager 1.7 percent increase in Foundation Aid (\$266 million). Foundation Aid is important to all of our schools, but it is especially vital to our least wealthy districts who this year are much more dependent on Foundation Aid allocation to make ends meet.

Solution: Provide \$880 million in Improved Foundation Aid...and DISTRIBUTE IT EQUITABLY. The current state aid system distributes funds at least partly based on the philosophy of making sure every school district gets a share. In practice, this means well-funded districts in wealthier communities receive a level of state aid (allowing for expanded programs and services) that is disproportionate in terms of need when compared to less funded districts that would benefit more from the aid.

Action Step #2

Develop a “laser talk”.

Deliver your messages more effectively by telling gripping stories in brief presentations known as “laser talks.”

➤ **Identify the Problem**

In your laser talk, focus first on identifying a problem you want your listener to know about. Try to connect the problem to an issue the listener already cares about.

➤ **Present a Solution**

Next, inform the listener about a solution to the problem you just presented. Give examples of how the solution would work and why it would be effective. You might cite a recent study or use other credible statistics.

➤ **Issue a call to Action**

The final section of the laser talk is the call to action. Calls to action should be concrete, specific and include a “yes” or “no” question.

➤ **Work in a personal story**

Try to include a compelling, personal story that expands on your laser talk.

Action Step #3

Write letters and email messages to your legislators...many also have Twitter and Facebook accounts—use them too.

Legislators often report that their inaction on an issue is simply because not enough people contacted them about it. Sending a message is a simple way to ensure your legislators know how you want to be represented. When writing:

- Include the same points that you refined in your laser talk. The message should include an introduction, problem statement, proposed solution, conclusion and call to action.
 - Keep your message short; a single page is best.
 - Be concise and specific, but add a personal touch.
 - Twitter and Facebook messages can also be effective because they are also available to a wider audience and allow for more frequent communications.
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Action Step #4

Develop a relationship with your legislators’ aides.

Sometimes knowing legislators’ aides can be just as valuable as knowing the legislators. Aides often have a great deal of influence on the assembly members and senators for whom they work as well as more time to devote to your concerns. Try to build great relationships with these essential staff members.

Action Step #5

Meet face to face with your legislators.

Ideally, your first meeting with a legislator should be before a problem arises. It’s also best to schedule a personal meeting in a legislator’s local district office. Keep in mind these additional tips for an effective meeting:

- **Be on time.** Legislators have full schedules and may not be available if you arrive late.
 - **Be concise.** Stick to your message, and expect no more than 15 minutes for a meeting.
 - **Be flexible.** If your legislator is late or can’t attend, convey the same message you had planned to deliver to the legislator’s aide.
 - **Be pleasant and appreciative.** Niceness and a bit of humor can make your visit memorable.
 - **Be passionate, not emotional.** Emotional pleas often make others uncomfortable.
 - **Be prepared.** Make sure you understand the arguments in opposition to your issue and have talking points prepared to combat them. Answer any questions your legislator may have and promise to follow up if you don’t immediately have an answer available. Have some materials that are relevant to your issue to leave behind.
 - **Be personal—about your issue.** Speak with passion about local children, local jobs, the local economy, local taxes, etc.
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How do I contact my elected officials?

N.Y.S. Senators: (listed by district #)

N.Y.S. Senator Patricia A. Ritchie **48th Senate District Office**

Dulles State Office Bldg., Room 418
Watertown, NY 13601
315/782-3418

Email: Ritchie@nysenate.gov

www.facebook.com/pages/State-Senator-Patty-Ritchie/186489928057565

Twitter: @SenatorRitchie

N.Y.S. Senator John A. DeFrancisco **50th Senate District Office**

800 State Office Bldg.
333 East Washington Street
Syracuse, NY 13202
315/428-7632

Email: jdefranc@nysenate.gov

www.facebook.com/pages/Senator-John-A-DeFrancisco/8776617150

Twitter: @JohnDeFrancisco

N.Y.S. Senator James L. Seward **51st Senate District Office**

41 South Main Street
Oneonta, NY 13820
607/432-5524

Email: seward@nysenate.gov

www.facebook.com/senatorjimseward

N.Y.S. Senator Fred Akshar **52nd Senate District Office**

1607 State Office Bldg.
44 Hawley Street
Binghamton, NY 13901
607/773-8771

Email: akshar@nysenate.gov

www.facebook.com/senatorfredakshar

Twitter: @fredakshar

N.Y.S. Senator David J. Valesky **53rd Senate District Office**

333 East Washington St., Rm 805
Syracuse, NY 13202
315/478-8745

Email: valesky@nysenate.gov

www.facebook.com/SenValesky

Twitter: @SenDaveValesky

PLEASE NOTE: Because legislative boundaries and school district boundaries don't match, multiple legislators may represent single school districts.

SCHOOL DISTRICT	SENATE DISTRICT	ASSEMBLY DISTRICT
APW	48	120
Auburn	50, 51, 54	126
Baldwinsville	50	129
Candor	51, 52	124
Cato-Meridian	48, 50, 54	130
Cazenovia	53	121
Central Square	47, 48, 50, 53	117, 120, 130
Chittenango	50, 53	121
Cincinnatus	51, 52	122, 126
Cortland	51	125
DeRuyter	51, 53	121, 126
Dryden	51, 52	124, 125
East Syr-Minoa	50, 53	127, 128
Fabius-Pompey	51, 53	127
F'ville-Manlius	50, 53	127
Fulton	48	120
Groton	51, 54	125
Hannibal	48, 54	130
Homer	50, 51, 53	126
Ithaca	51, 52, 54, 58	124, 125
Jamesville-DeWitt	50, 53	127, 128
Jordan-Elbridge	50	126
LaFayette	50, 53	126, 128
Lansing	51, 54	125
Liverpool	50, 53	127, 128
Lyncourt	53	129
Marathon	51, 52	122, 124, 126
Marcellus	50	126
McGraw	51	126
Mexico	48	120
Moravia	50, 51, 54	126
N. Syracuse	50, 53	127
Newfield	51, 58	125
Onondaga	50, 53	128
Oswego City	48, 54	120, 130
Phoenix	48, 50	120
Port Byron	54	126, 130
Skaneateles	50, 51	126
Solvay	50, 53	129
Southern Cayuga	51, 54	126
Syracuse City	50, 53	128, 129
Trumansburg	54, 58	125, 132
Tully	50, 51, 53	127, 126
Union Springs	50, 54	126
Weedsport	50, 54	126
West Genesee	50	126
Westhill	50, 53	129

N.Y.S. Senator Michael F. Nozzolio
54th Senate District Office

119 Fall Street
Seneca Falls, NY 13148
1-888-568-9816
Email: nozzolio@nysenate.gov
www.facebook.com/SenatorNozzolio
Twitter: @SenatorNozzolio

N.Y.S. Senator Thomas F. O'Mara
58th Senate District Office

333 East Water Street
Elmira, NY 14901
607/735-9671
Email: omara@nysenate.gov
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/New-York-State-Senator-Tom-OMara/151463428240765>
Twitter: @SenatorOMarra

Chair of the N.Y.S. Senate
Education Committee:

Senator Carl L. Marcellino
Room 811 LOB, Albany, NY 12247
(518) 455-2290
Email: Marcelli@nysenate.gov
<https://www.facebook.com/senatorcarlmarcellino>
Twitter: @Senator98

N.Y.S. Senate Majority Leader:

Senator John J. Flanagan
Room 330, State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12247
(518) 455-2071
Email: Flanagan@nysenate.gov
www.facebook.com/sen.john.flanagan

N.Y.S. Assembly Members:

(listed by district #)

Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush

117th District Office
40 Franklin St., Suite 2
Carthage, NY 13619
315/493-3909
Email: blankenbushk@assembly.state.ny.us
<https://www.facebook.com/Blankenbush>

Assemblyman William A. Barclay

120th District Office
200 North Second Street
Fulton, NY 13069
315-598-5185
Email: BarclaW@assembly.state.ny.us
www.facebook.com/AssemblymanWillBarclay
Twitter: @willabarclay

Assemblyman William Magee

121st District Office
214 Farrier Avenue
Oneida, NY 13421
315/361-4125
Email: MageeW@assembly.state.ny.us
www.facebook.com/pages/Assemblyman-Bill-Magee-District-Office/1652193341730675

Assemblyman Clifford W. Crouch
122nd District Office

1 Kattelville Road, Suite 1
Binghamton, NY 13901
607/648-6080
Email: CrouchC@assembly.state.ny.us
www.facebook.com/cliff.crouch.7?fref=nf

Assemblyman Christopher S. Friend
124th District Office

476 Maple Street, PO Box 441
Big Flats, NY 14814
607/562-3602
Email: friendc@assembly.state.ny.us
www.facebook.com/pages/Assemblyman-Chris-Friend/261283093907822

Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton
125th District Office

106 East Court Street
Ithaca, NY 14850
607/277-8030
Email: LiftonB@assembly.state.ny.us
www.facebook.com/pages/Assemblywoman-Barbara-Lifton/141413322537719

Assemblyman Gary D. Finch
126th District Office

69 South Street
Auburn, NY 13021
315/255-3045
Email: FinchG@assembly.state.ny.us
<https://www.facebook.com/AssemblymanGaryDFinch>

Assemblyman Al Stirpe
127th District Office

7293 Buckley Road, Suite 201
N. Syracuse, NY 13212
315/452-1115
Email: StirpeA@assembly.state.ny.us
<https://www.facebook.com/AssemblymanAlStirpe>
Twitter: @stirpeal

**Assemblywoman Pamela J. Hunter
128th District Office**

711 East Genesee St., 2nd Floor
Syracuse, NY 13210-1540
315/449-9536

Email: HunterP@assembly.state.ny.us

**Assemblyman William B. Magnarelli
129th District Office**

333 East Washington St., Room 840
Syracuse, NY 13202
315/428-9651

Email: MagnarW@assembly.state.ny.us

www.facebook.com/william.magnarelli

Twitter: @BillMagnarelli

**Assemblyman Bob Oaks
130th District Office**

10 Leach Road
Lyons, NY 14489
315/946-5166

Email: OaksR@assembly.state.ny.us

<https://www.facebook.com/assemblymanoaks>

**Assemblyman Philip A. Palmesano
132nd District Office**

105 E. Steuben St.
Bath, NY 14810
607/776-9691

Email: palmesanop@assembly.state.ny.us

www.facebook.com/Assemblyman-Phil-Palmesano-542051452491033/?fref=nf

Twitter: @PhilPalmesano

**Chair of the N.Y.S. Assembly
Education Committee:**

Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan
Room 836 LOB, Albany, NY 12248
(518) 455-4851

Email: nolanc@assembly.state.ny.us

<https://www.facebook.com/catherine.nolan.165?fref=ts>

N.Y.S. Assembly Speaker:

Assemblyman Carl E. Heastie
Room 932 LOB, Albany, NY 12248
(518) 455-3791

Email: speaker@assembly.state.ny.us

www.facebook.com/Honorable-Speaker-of-the-New-York-State-Assembly-Carl-E-Heastie-140974846001214/

Twitter: @CarlEHeastie

Representing New York State:

**N.Y.S. Board of Regents – Judicial District V
Regent Anthony S. Bottar, Vice Chancellor**

120 Madison Street, Suite 1600, AXA Tower II,
Syracuse, NY 13202

Phone: (315) 422-3466

Email: RegentBottar@mail.nysed.gov

**N.Y.S. Board of Regents – Judicial District VI
Regent James R. Tallon, Jr.**

United Hospital Fund, 1411 Broadway, 12th Floor, New
York, N.Y. 10018

Phone (212) 494-0777 Email:

RegentTallon@mail.nysed.gov

**N.Y.S. Board of Regents – Judicial District VII
Regent T. Andrew Brown**

925 Crossroads Building, Two State Street, Rochester,
NY 14614

Phone (585) 454-3667

Email: RegentBrown@mail.nysed.gov

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

N.Y. State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224
(518) 474-8390

Email: Andrew.cuomo@exec.ny.gov

www.facebook.com/GovernorAndrewCuomo

Twitter: @NYGovCuomo

Whole New York Senate

Twitter: @nysenate

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/NYsenate/info?tab=page_info

New York Assembly: (the Assembly has it separated
out, GOP and Democrats)

Twitter GOP: [@NYS_AM](https://twitter.com/NYS_AM)

Twitter Democrats: [@NYSA_Majority](https://twitter.com/NYSA_Majority)