

EDUCATION

Public welcome to school finance, advocacy forum at West Middle School



JANUARY 29, 2016 2:00 PM • [CARRIE CHANTLER | CARRIE.CHANTLER@LEE.NET](#)

Taxpayers, parents, school administrators, booster clubs and school board members are encouraged to attend a forum to advocate for improved public school financing.

"The whole community needs to stand up and let lawmakers know what we need," said Monika Salvage, Auburn school board member and communications coordinator for the Statewide School Finance Consortium.

The Tuesday advocacy forum will feature Dr. Rick Timbs, SSFC executive director, who will present "Standing Tall for our Children and Schools."

Timbs' remarks will center around two chief concerns, Salvage said. He will discuss the state's continued reduction in school aid via the Gap Elimination Adjustment, first instituted in 2010, which cuts the amount of aid to schools to cover state budget gaps.

"It was gimmick to draw money away from school districts when the state had financial problems themselves," Salvage said.

Cuomo has said he aims to eliminate the GEA within two years, but legislators want the practice to stop sooner. The state Senate has approved legislation calling for a stop to GEA in one year, the Assembly has yet to make known its stance on the issue.

Additionally, Timbs will explain how schools will benefit from a refiguring of the state formula determining Foundation Aid allocations. Foundation Aid is the main source of funding to New York's public schools covering district operations.

The formula determining aid allocations, Salvage says, is faulty and doesn't end up equitably distributing funding to the districts most in need.

Based on a district's poverty rate, income distribution, free-and-reduced meal participation, the formula takes into account these factors indicating a district's ability to pay for public education.

"It's not equitable. it's not in favor of medium- to low-wealth districts," she said. "For some reason, they don't get it right."

This year, school districts statewide are contending with the prospect of a tight tax cap limit of .12 percent. This cap limits the ability for "local control," Salvage said. In order for schools to override the tax cap limit, a supermajority of voters, or more than 60 percent, would have to approve a tax increase.

According to a news release, Charles Borgognoni, executive director of the Central New York School Boards Association, said the forum's goal is inform stakeholders and provide "actual, non-politicized facts about what is really at stake as the 2016-17 state budget is hammered out in Albany."

If you go

WHAT: Third Annual Public Education Community Forum

WHEN: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 2

WHERE: West Middle School, 217 Genesee St., Auburn

INFO: Live-streamed webcast available at district.auburn.cnyric.org