



# CNYSBA NEWS

**Train, Empower, Advocate, and Mobilize for Students**

## Upcoming CNYSBA Events

### Save The Dates

March 14 – Finance Committee Meeting

March 16 – Pathways to Careers – Save the date

March 21 – CNYSBA Board of Directors Mtg

March 30 – Roundtable Event – Save the date

April 27 – Roundtable Event – Save the date

May 2 – CNYSBA Board of Directors Mtg

May 11 – OMSBA Board of Directors Meeting

May 24 – CNYSBA Annual Dinner – Save the date



## Gov. Kathy Hochul Budget- *Here's what she's proposing for schools*

*Reference: [Governor.ny.gov](http://Governor.ny.gov)*

Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget is out and here's what she's saying her proposal means for students and schools.

### **Supporting Students and Schools**

All New York students deserve a high-quality education, from prekindergarten through college.

Continued on next page



## Addressing Challenges to Controversial Books

By Lindsay Plantholt



For years there have been efforts to ban certain books in schools. Parents’ concerns have ranged from profanity and sexual content to the political leanings of various authors. More recently, the outcry against the perceived inclusion of “critical race theory” in schools has gained national attention. How can school boards and administrators address parent concerns while also maintaining a robust and high-quality selection of library books for students?

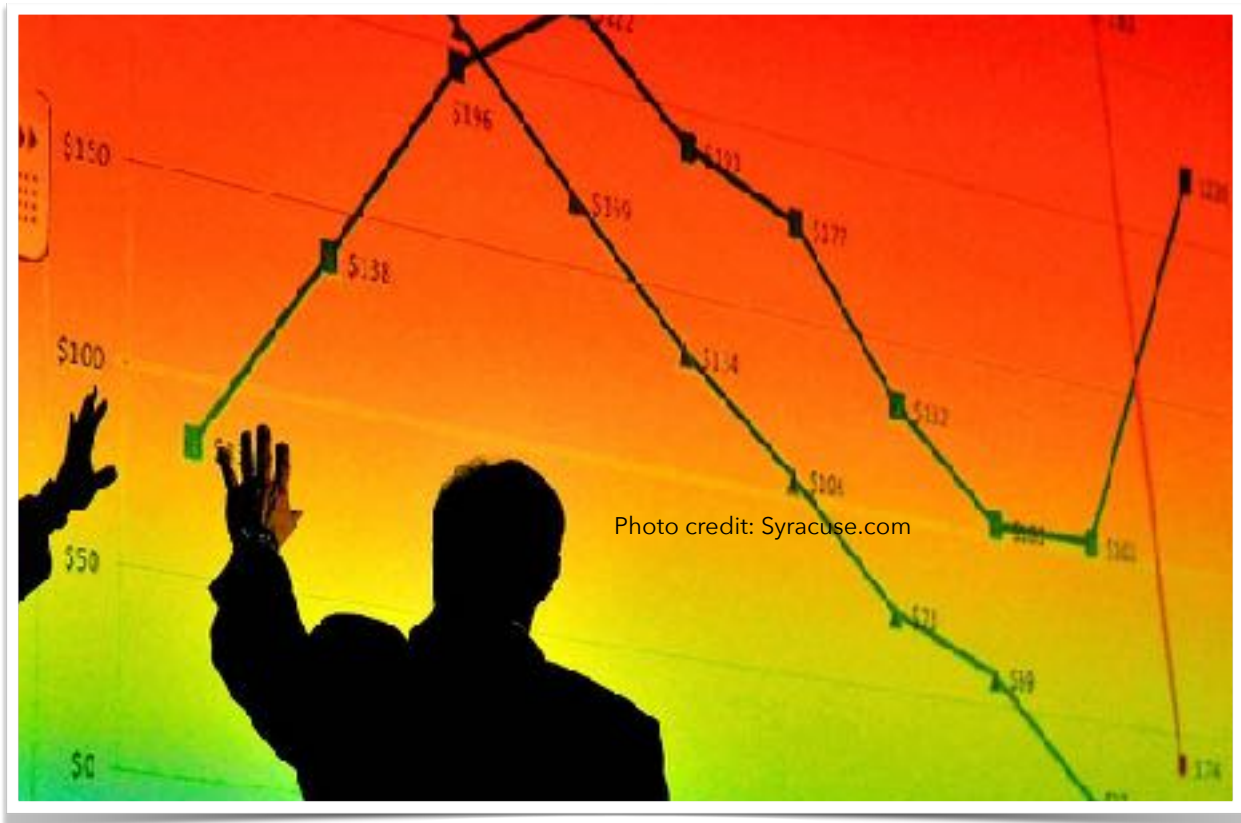
School boards have broad discretion in determining how to govern their school district, including determining the curriculum and what books are available in their libraries. New York State Education Law specifically delegates to school boards the task of designating school library materials to be used in schools. More importantly, parents may not compel a school district to use or not use a particular book.

*Continued on Page 6*

Governor Hochul will allocate a historic \$34.5 billion in total School Aid, the highest level of State aid in history. This funding will help give every child in New York the tools to succeed through a high-quality education. Funding for education includes:

- \$24 billion for Foundation Aid— a \$2.7 billion increase from last year— to complete Governor Hochul’s three-year phase-in to fully funding Foundation Aid for the first time in history.
- \$1.5 billion in new capital projects for SUNY and CUNY.
- \$250 million of the historic increase in Foundation Aid to establish high impact tutoring to address learning loss.
- \$125 million expanding prekindergarten to bring the State’s annual support for such programs to \$1.2 billion.
- \$270 million in new operating support for SUNY and CUNY campuses.
- \$400 million in SUNY transformation capital initiatives, including \$200 million for research labs at the University at Buffalo and Stony Brook University and \$200 million for a digital transformation of IT infrastructure throughout the SUNY system.
- \$500 million to create the first-ever New York State matching fund for contributions made to the endowments of SUNY’s four university centers. Governor Hochul will also eliminate the regional cap on the number of charter schools in New York City and authorize the reissuance of charters due to surrender, revocation, termination, or non-renewal. These changes will permit the issuance of additional charters in New York City and expand educational opportunities for students.

# Be a Constituent representative on behalf of your School District!



By Dr. Rick Timbs

The Executive budget proposal has been announced and school districts have their first look at what they might expect in the amount of state aid they may receive.

Additionally, the Executive Proposal also outlines some of state’s initiatives and we must evaluate how they will affect school districts.

The state aid Executive Proposal looks robust but there are items that need to be opposed or supported. It is hoped that there will be an on-time budget this year (by April 1) so now is the time in discuss your interests and concerns with local state representatives.

Below is a list of items commonly mentioned as worthy of a conversation with local state legislators. You may have more items of your own, but this list will get the conversations started.

- Oppose: **Freezing state aid to the November Data Base**; this would hurt school districts as the data would not be updated to reflect the true aid eligible payments and thus, they would not be paid to the school district
- Support: Transportation Aid for the transportation for 4-year-old children for Pre-K programs
- Oppose: Hi Impact Tutoring Set-Aside Foundation Aid is supposed to be unrestricted aid.
- Support: Increase Unrestricted Unappropriated funds to 10% of the following year's budget to enhance cashflow and as a buffer against inflationary trends
- Support: Extending the Retiree Earnings Exemption to enable district to meet labor needs
- Support: The increase of the Capital outlay program to an amount of \$250,000, and allow the use of the funds in multiple building simultaneously.
- Support: Streamlining Reporting requirements; eliminate the state transparency reporting requirement as it is an unnecessary duplication of the Federal reporting requirements.
- Support: Increase in CTE funding; increase aid eligible salary amount to \$60,000
- Support: Adjustments to the tax cap. PILOTs should be included in the tax base growth factor as they represent actual increases in tax base; allow for pension costs to be included as exclusion if they increase over 4% of the preceding year.
- Oppose: Charter School Expansion: state support for this system is untenable, unnecessary and diverts funds from the actual public-school systems the constitution requires to be protected.

- Support: Universal Student meal programs; provide help for low-income families as the school district meal programs are simplified and made more efficient.
- Support: The creation of a “Blue Ribbon Commission” to study Foundation Aid; its equity and adequacy.
  - Encourage the “costing out” of the true cost of education in NYS.
  - upgrade the CWR calculation.
  - increase weighting in the formula for Students with Special Needs, English Language Learners, and other demographic categories including the school districts that are rural and deal with sparsity.
- Support: The payout of the Prior Year Que; funds owed to school district for recognized clerical errors.

If I can assist in anyway, please give me a call.

Rick

**Visit the New SSFC Website.**

**[www.SSFCdata.org](http://www.SSFCdata.org)**

*Get the latest data and school finance information from Dr. Rick Timbs.*

The Statewide School Finance Consortium (SSFC) is an organization of more than 400 New York State public school districts whose mission is to bring equity to the distribution of New York State educational aid. SSFC membership is largely comprised of school districts from average and low-wealth communities that receive a disproportionate share of state funding in comparison to high-wealth regions of New York. The reform of the state aid process will help ensure that all of New York's children receive the same educational opportunities regardless of the wealth or location of their community.

Continued from page 2

Nevertheless, there are certain restrictions on a school board’s discretion. The courts have consistently held that school districts should encourage free speech as opposed to curtail speech or the expression of ideas. In making determinations regarding the removal of books, any action taken by a board designee neutral.” removals designated administrator should be reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns, rather than based on the social, religious, political, or philosophical views of an author or work.



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With respect to legal challenges against school boards that have removed books from school libraries or curriculum, the courts typically find a violation of students’ First Amendment rights if removal is content-based or reflective of board members’ personal taste and values. By comparison, if a school board removes a book due to vulgar or sexually explicit content, such decision is less likely to be overturned by a court. Again, the legal standard to consider is that removal must be reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns. It should not be to restrict access to certain political, social or moral views.

With respect to a school district’s refusal to remove a book from its curriculum and libraries, the courts generally defer to the discretion of the school board. By way of example, in *Monteiro v. Temple Union High School Dist.*, 158 F.3d 1022 (9th Cir. 1998), the Court denied a parent’s request to ban certain books, including *Huckleberry Finn*, from a school district’s curriculum based on the allegation that such book was racist. The Court concluded, however, that the book had already been determined to have intrinsic educational value. The Court further discussed how removing a book for racial stereotypes of a particular group could open the door to removing other great literary works including *Toni Morrison*, *Tennessee Williams*, *Hemingway*, and *Shakespeare*. Ultimately the Court did not want to restrict students’ rights to receive material that a school board or other educational authority deemed to be of legitimate educational value.

What tools do school districts have with respect to challenges of their own library books? We recommend that districts begin by reviewing any board policies related to the selection and maintenance of library materials, to determine whether such policies are well articulated and followed. Your policies should outline considerations when reviewing material, such as the quality of the literary material, the reputation and significance of the author, the appropriateness of the material for the age, grade, and maturity level of the students who will be reading it, the material’s relationship to the school district’s instructional programs, and the authenticity of the material.

School districts should also establish unbiased procedures for the review of controversial materials if brought to a board’s attention. This can involve establishing a small committee comprised of teachers and administrators to address challenges to library materials. The committee’s recommendations should be submitted to the board for approval. It is also important for board members to understand that their decisions as board members must not be based on personal preferences or values.

*Lindsay A. Plantholt is an Associate Attorney with Ferrara Fiorenza PC*

## Henninger Students Create Illustrations for SCSD Alumna's First Book



Growing up, Paola Benevento grew accustomed to people struggling to pronounce her name. As a student at Huntington – and then Henninger, where she graduated in 2009 – she said her name caused her a great deal of anxiety and discomfort.

Thanks to a SUPA English class in her high school years, Paola discovered her love for writing – a passion that she pursued in college. Now a teacher in the Bronx, Paola's love for writing, combined with her personal experiences growing up and a passion for finding solutions, inspired her to add an additional title to her resume: author!

Her first book, *Philomena and the Name Game*, is a children's picture book that follows the journey of an Italian-Haitian-American 4th grader as she accepts her name as a positive part of her identity.

“During my time as an educator, I have actively sought out texts that represent the cultural, historical, and geographical experiences of my students,” Paola explained. “What I found was that this in itself became a full-time job!”

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I realized that this was a problem that many other educators, parents, students and advocates for equitable representation faced. It was after this realization that I decided to create stories that I wish I had for my students and even myself at a young age. I fell in love with the idea of ‘If you don’t see it, create it!’”

Paola said Philomena’s story is not only representative of the frustration she and some of her classmates felt growing up – but also the frustration that some of her current 7th grade students in New York City experience.

“As a teacher, I have about 90 students pass through my door each school year,” she said. “When we are getting to know one another, sometimes they have difficulty saying my name, and sometimes I have difficulty saying their names. I remember one of my students told me, ‘well, that’s close enough’ after my third attempt at their name. However, I stopped the student and said ‘It is your name. Close enough is not good enough.’ I want people with the ‘difficult’ names to correct others EVERY SINGLE TIME!”

In speaking with other adults, she discovered that many of them were connecting with the book as well, as they reflected with sadness on past and present times when their names are pronounced incorrectly.

“I hope that this book shows readers of all ages that our names have great meaning and power; our names are how we introduce ourselves to the world,” Paola shared. “Be proud and don’t let others make you feel like your name is less important or special than others. It is important and powerful for children to open a book and see characters that not only have shared similar experiences as they have, but also characters that look like them, speak the same language(s) as them, live in similar spaces and more. Relatable content helps children develop a strong sense of identity and it also fosters engagement, which can lead to a deep love of literacy!”

As Paola looked into publishing options for her book, she discovered two major challenges: first, she had never published a book before; and second, she self-admittedly isn’t an illustrator – and her picture book needed pictures!

In researching publishers and the process involved, she realized publishing was something she could handle on her own – and thanks to the mentorship of a friend who had self-published, her publishing company, Empire Orange, was born.

“As a self-publisher and business owner, you are faced with making many decisions,” Paola shared. “I chose to be very intentional with all of my decisions, from content, collaborators, and more. My publishing company is called Empire Orange in order to pay homage to the two cities that made me who I am: Syracuse and New York City. The mission of the publishing company is to highlight and elevate voices, talent, and beauty in spaces that are often overlooked and/or undervalued. To me, individuals living in Syracuse were and are often undervalued— especially depending upon what neighborhood you’re from.”

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While searching for illustrators, Paola recalled her childhood friends who had been in the art program at Henninger High School.

“I remember the amazing work they would produce with Art teacher Lori Lizzio,” she said, noting that her sister was previously Ms. Lizzio’s art student. “I feel as if I have many talents, but drawing is not one of them! I used to just be in awe that people my age-- teenagers-- could do what they were doing!”

She connected with Ms. Lizzio, who pitched the opportunity to her art students, and received great interest from three student artists: Mario Meledez-Tellez, Mellina DeSilvio, and Lauren Cameron.

“Mellina, Lauren and Mario are so incredibly talented but also really awesome humans,” Ms. Lizzio shared. “They’re kind, modest and hard-working and I felt that this opportunity would mean a lot to them. I loved Paola’s idea of showcasing the talent in our district. It’s so important that alumni connect back to the school they went to. Earlier this year, we all met here in my classroom and we laughed as Paola shared memories of being in the building. My students really connected with her. I think my students will feel so proud when this goes to print and they were a part of it... they got a real sense of what it is like to work professionally as artists with deadlines and changes. I am so proud of them and what they did!”

“From the very beginning, they have been amazing!” Paola added of the students. “They became invested in the story immediately, and I love that we all talk about Philomena like she is a mutual friend of ours! It is great to work with people who are invested not only in your story, but your message as well. While most authors traditionally work with one illustrator, after meeting them and looking at their work samples, I couldn’t turn any of them away. We talked about what each one felt their strengths were and we divided up the illustrations that way.”

Mario drew all of the characters, Mellina drew all of the background and scenery, and Lauren outlined and colored all of the illustrations.

“When Mrs. Lizzio came to me about this project, I was immediately excited,” Mellina shared. “I knew this could be an awesome opportunity for me to work with new people and complete a job doing something I love. Throughout the process, I was designing and drawing out most of the backgrounds – by the end of it, I was drawing out whole pictures. This book has taught me so much: to push myself, to be patient, and to better understand perspective. The best part has definitely been working with Paola. She was very consistent and clear with how to make the drawings fit better into the book. She was very patient with us and would give us a lot of leeway to showcase our own creativity!”

“I didn’t choose these students solely because of their geographic location, but because of what that means for them,” Paola explained of the students. “The media often picks up on the negative occurrences at Henninger and within the SCSD; it doesn’t focus enough on the positive. There is so much talent that came out of the SCSD, and that’s currently there, and I want everyone to see what they can do. These three students are now able to add this body of work to their own portfolios and can say that they have collaboratively worked with an artistic team and author to produce illustrations for a children’s book. They are able to take something away from this experience which will help guide them in their next steps as an artist.”

[If you would like to contribute to help fund the completion of this project – primarily, printing and shipping costs – please click here to visit Ms. Benevento’s Kickstarter campaign.](#) The plan is for printing to begin in early 2022. Donors also have the option to allocate funds toward an Arts scholarship which will be awarded to a graduating SCSD senior!

*This article is courtesy of the Syracuse City School District*

**LET'S TALK  
BUDGET!**

**A NEW BOARD MEMBER  
ROUNDTABLE EVENT**



**Virtual Event  
February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
5:15pm – 6:15pm**

All CNYSBA Members are invited to join us for valuable dialogue with Suzanne Slack from OCM BOCES and Mike Sheperd from Citi BOCES around understanding the budget, what to look for, an opportunity to ask questions, and gain a better understanding of the nuances involving a district budget.

Did You Miss This Event?

Watch the Video by Clicking

[Here.](#)



# 2023 VIRTUAL LEGISLATIVE FORUMS MULTI-DAY SCHEDULE

from Central New York School  
Boards Association and  
Statewide School Finance  
Consortium

CNYSBA and SSFC would like to invite you to register for any of our upcoming 2023 Legislative Forums. These events are FULLY REMOTE and will be 90 mins in length and consist of a presentation from Guest Speaker Dr. Rick Timbs, President of Statewide School Finance Consortium (SSFC). Also, the event will include time for Questions and Answers with your local Legislatures.

*Did You  
Miss  
These  
Legislative  
Forums?*

*Click on  
the links  
below  
to watch  
the video.*

[OCM BOCES 2/4](#)

[CAYUGA-  
ONONDAGA  
BOCES 2/11](#)

[TST BOCES 2/11](#)

# You Do What for a Living?

**Watch our video segment, You Do What  
for a Living? to learn about Alivia Allen -  
a Syracuse-area Iron Worker.  
(Click on the video below to view)**



Click on the Video Above to View

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