



Gerard Bringmann
Legislative Activities Chair
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On the federal level, President Trump's controversial nominee for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has been confirmed by the Senate. It was the first time in history that the Vice President had to cast the deciding vote to break a 50-50 tie to confirm a Cabinet Member. Needless to say, her actions will be closely monitored by an Educational Community which appears to have serious concerns over her qualifications to hold this position. Among other things, Secretary DeVos is a major champion of Charter Schools and school vouchers.

On the State Level, I had the opportunity to attend the Legislative Breakfast on Feb. 4th @ Longwood and came away with the following observations:

- Legislators in attendance (3 State Senators & 6 Assemblymen) indicated that there will definitely be more State Aid available to schools than carried in the Governor's initial budget proposal. In fact, we may see a record increase. The Senate & Assembly will soon be issuing their own budgets and negotiations will start immediately thereafter to meld the three budgets into the final NYS Budget for the upcoming fiscal year by the April 1st deadline. Based on their comments, along with a slightly better tax cap than last year and less contributions needed to the Teachers Retirement Account, I feel that we can be cautiously optimistic about the financials for the 2017-18 School Year.
- The outlook for following school years is not that optimistic. There is no guarantee New York State can continue to pump in additional State Aid each year, especially should there be a downturn in the economy. Also, there doesn't seem to be much support at this time to modify the tax cap to a "true two" percent cap. Legislators did vow to try to modify the tax cap law to eliminate the possibility of any districts being forced to have a negative tax cap. We were cautioned however that the Governor appears to be opposed to ANY changes in the tax cap law.
- Regarding the "Excelsior Scholarship Program" – The program the Governor wants phased in over two years and make any child from a family makes less than \$125,000 per year (by 2019), eligible for free college tuition, if they went to Community College or a SUNY College, does not appear to have any reasonable chance of being approved by

the State Legislature due to a number of reasons including cost & logistics. However, there may be support for raising the TAP threshold from its current \$80,000 cap.

- There was a presentation on the increased numbers of ESL students that we are seeing here on Long Island and the cost for their needed services.
- There was a presentation on poverty issues and the impact on our schools. While we still outperform the balance of NYS, our low wealth schools are not performing nearly as well as high wealth districts. Our poverty rate is just under 10%, the best of any region in the state, however it is rising rapidly. In Suffolk County about 35% of our students are now receiving free or reduced lunch, about a 75% increase over the last ten years.
- We have also seen a large increase in the number of students with disabilities over the past ten years and with them related cost increases.
- Foundation Aid – it was mentioned that we on Long Island need to fight to have the current formula changed, as it strongly favors urban over suburban school districts.
- Mandate Relief – the legislators in attendance (in particular, Senator Marcellino) said that they would be willing to fight for mandate relief, but that they need to hear from our school districts, as to which mandates can go, should go, need to be modified or are simply inappropriate for Long Island.
- There appears to be support for increased BOCES funding and the creation of career tracks in our schools for auto mechanics, construction trades, etc. Not every student needs to go to college to make a decent living and there are many occupations short of qualified applicants.
- There also appears to be support for additional funding/resources (counselors, etc.) for both mental health & substance abuse.
- Senator LaValle stated that he'd like input from our School Boards/Superintendents regarding local diplomas and what can and/or should be done to address the current situation.