



PORT WASHINGTON Union Free School District

February 6, 2020

Hon. Carl Heastie, Speaker of the New York State Assembly
Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Majority Leader of the State Senate
Hon. Michael Benedetto, Chair of the NYS Assembly Education Committee
Hon. Shelley Mayer, Chair of the NYS Senate Education Committee,
Hon. Anthony D'Urso, NYS Assemblyman for the 16th District
Hon. Anna Kaplan, NYS Senator for the 7th District

Dear New York State Legislators:

As a resident and tax-paying member of the Port Washington School District community, I am writing on behalf of our school district, our students and all taxpayers in Port Washington to request that the state honor its long-standing promise to deliver to our school district its fair and equitable share of state aid. We can no longer afford to continue to shoulder such a huge percentage of the tax burden as a consequence of the state underfunding our school district year after year by millions of dollars.

Port Washington taxpayers are currently funding almost 90 percent of the costs of public education through real estate property taxes and assessments, while our district receives less than 7% percent in state aid. Compare this to districts statewide that receive, on average, over 30 percent in state aid. This is patently unfair, especially as our needs become greater and our options to further reduce expenditures diminish.

In addition to the lack of state funding, our district has also had to accommodate more students. While statewide student enrollment continues to decline, Port Washington's enrollment has grown to 5,518 students, an increase of approximately 24 percent over the course of 20 years. This increase far surpasses any of our neighboring school districts. During this same time, our community has become more diverse. Forty-one languages are now spoken in the Port Washington community. Students speaking more than 21 languages are serviced by our schools. Over 8 percent of our district student population are enrolled in ENL classes, higher than any of our neighboring districts and with a growing free and reduced lunch population at almost 16 percent. The number of our students receiving special education services has increased to almost 15 percent.

As a result of our district not receiving its fair share of state aid, critical and difficult decisions based on economics, rather than what is in the best interests of our students, have had to be made. These have included reducing staff despite increasing enrollment, reducing expenditures for the arts and athletic programs, and implementing a staggered bus schedule. The reality is, if the state continues to underfund our district, more cuts will have to be made, further compromising the excellence of the educational program available to the children of the Port Washington community.

There are several areas we believe the state needs to address, most critically the Foundation Aid Formula, which does not take into consideration Port Washington's economic diversity. Due to our combined wealth ratio and other factors used to distribute additional aid, Port Washington does not fit into the pre-existing slots and therefore falls through the financial cracks. The current formula used to distribute state aid does not have the flexibility to encompass the exceptional nature of our community.

The taxpayers of Port Washington have been shortchanged of our fair share of state aid for far too long. While we have been able to maintain a high level of education in spite of the state's delinquency in addressing this issue, the situation is not sustainable. The formula must be changed to more accurately represent our district's needs and our district's rightful share of state funding.

Name: _____ Print: _____

Address: _____