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Senate Republicans vote to eliminate GEA



BY JOSEPH SPECTOR ON JANUARY 11, 2016. TIME POSTED: 5:05 PM

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Senate Republicans voted Monday to eliminate the remaining \$400 million in aid that had been withheld from schools in recent years as a report contended that schools are owed \$4.8 billion from the state.

Republicans said they would work during budget negotiations to restore the \$434 million that remained from the Gap Elimination Adjustment, which were cuts that were made to districts starting in 2009 amid the state's fiscal woes.

The state has been slowly paying back districts the more than \$2 billion that had been withheld, but the \$434 million remains. Gov. Andrew Cuomo will release his 2016-17 budget proposal Wednesday for the fiscal year that starts April 1.

The Senate voted 53-9 to support ending the GEA.

"The GEA represented the worst of Albany, robbing upstate schools of funding they deserved simply to help politicians plug a budget gap of their own making," Sen. Rich Funke, R-Penfield, Monroe County, said in a statement.

New York spends \$23.5 billion on aid to its nearly 700 school districts, by far the most in the nation. Districts have received increases that have averaged more than 5 percent a year in recent years, but school advocates said more is needed after years of cuts or flat aid during the recession.

The Alliance for Quality Education, a labor-backed group, released a report Sunday claiming state public schools are underfunded and in need of an additional \$4.8 billion.

The pro-education coalition said if \$4.8 billion were allocated in the upcoming state budget it would provide much needed resources in public schools to help increase the graduation rate.

The report, released Sunday, is based upon the findings of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity ruling, which was a 2006 court case that determined New York was not properly funding public schools and ruled that New York City schools were in need of additional funding of over \$10 billion.

Although the ruling was specific to New York City, advocates say the same lack of funding is similar to schools across the state.

"The report shows that our students, despite their successes, are blocked from reaching their highest potential," said Billy Easton, the group's executive director, in a statement.

The school districts of Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers and Syracuse combined are owed over \$3 million while high-need small city school districts are owed around \$8.9 million, according to the report.

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High-need rural districts are owed about \$2.6 million. Average need districts are owed around \$9.7 million and wealthy districts are owed about \$3.7 million, the report found.

(AP Photo)

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