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SSFC

THE STATEWIDE SCHOOL FINANCE CONSORTIUM

Dedicated to Secure Equitable Funding for New York State Public Schools

State Aid & New York State Public School Districts Annual Professional Performance Review

Knowledge is power. Francis Bacon

Session #1

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Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

- Membership has grown this year to **433 school districts** – or roughly **62% of the state’s school districts**. This includes districts from the Canadian border in the North and West, down and across to our borders with Pennsylvania, Vermont & Massachusetts, as well as into the Mid-Hudson Valley and Long Island.
- Our enrollment, geographic reach and strong corps of public education activists provide SSFC with a powerful and credible platform provided the tip of the spear to **FINALLY ELIMINATE THE GEA**.
- This core of activists have displayed courage in the face of adversity and have demonstrated the leadership needed to convince the Governor and Legislature that our goals have merit and are just.
- SSFC has remained focused on our goals and has not be drawn into issues or battles that would cause us to be less effective, distract us from our mission or reduce our resources.
- Thanks to your help, we were able to keep moving forward on our shared concerns and remedies for **equitable, adequate, sustainable and predictable state aid**.

Now, the **Focus must be on FOUNDATION AID in that context**.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Among our key accomplishments:

- We continued our concerted, statewide media relations effort that resulted in regular analytical, reasonable and responsible contributions, state aid updates, and calls to action on Time Warner’s *Capital Tonight*, Public Radio’s *Capitol Pressroom*, Public Television’s *Insight* and in scores of stories and editorials in newspapers and other media, large and small, across NYS.
- SSFC private and public workshops, website and media reports armed Superintendents, board members, central office personnel, all levels of school district staff, parents, residents, legislators and influential members of the media with the latest state aid data, examples and evidence about:
 - inequities, inconsistencies and the current unpredictable nature of state aid, and;
 - the fiscal and educational conditions of school districts that were most likely to face fiscal calamity in the future.
 - Fought for helpful and needed Tax Cap changes.
- Engaged with allies in state organizations and other stakeholders we significantly expressed displeasure, as well as remedies, to the Governor, state legislators and staff.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Accomplishments (continued):

- Driven by community/school board forums held in every major region of NYS, awareness of our serious needs was defined and communicated, leading to a dramatic escalation in advocacy efforts that fought for real equity based on need. These forums were supplemented by other workshops, consultations and events held in many BOCES regions and interactions with other statewide groups.
- In all, nearly dozens of data-driven, accurate and comprehensive presentations were given to the media, at retreats and community forums, to legislators, local school boards associations, superintendent groups, SED & Board of Regents representatives, professional organizations, state conferences, panels, PTAs, business leaders, and other public programming from April 1, 2015 to now...AND - we already have over a dozen more scheduled for 2016-17.
- SSFC website continues to provide easier access to data, analysis & advocacy materials, as well as letter-writing technology, news on vital developments, events and issues in public education.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Accomplishments (continued):

- Established key alliances and worked closely with the Mid-Hudson Study Council, *REFIT* (Reform Educational Financing Inequities Today on Long Island), *Rural Schools Association* (RSA) and New York State PTA and the Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI). SSFC also continued healthy and vigorous dialogue with NYSCOSS, ASBO, SED, AQE, NYSSBA, NYSUT and the citizens budget commission. SSFC’s incontestable data convinced other state organizations to step up their efforts in the fight for more equitable, adequate and sustainable state aid and final elimination of the GEA.
- Analyzed various state aid proposals and reacted honestly to strengths and weaknesses. Provided honest, unambiguous and energetic counsel as needed to all others who sought to help us meet our goals. The findings, recommendations and implications of SSFC research clearly motivated other state organizations to create or enhance their research capacities.
- SSFC research continues to be validated, strengthened or reinforced by parallel studies and/or academic scrutiny by seasoned and analytical professionals such as Bob Lowry of *NYSCOSS*, Deborah Cunningham of *ASBO* and Bruce Baker of *Rutgers University*, and John Yinger of *Syracuse University*.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Accomplishments (continued):

- Provided to researchers and all other stakeholders every plausible means to clearly explain the fiscal conditions school districts face through the use of our data, website, workshops and community forums. Our data included every NYS school district...whether SSFC members or non-members.
- Cited and explained to schools the factors that influence their state aid — or lack of it — and debunked state aid myths. These initiatives created greater public understanding of the development of school district budgets, the role and the impacts — long and short term — that state aid and the Property Tax Cap...as well as the need for a serious attempt to eradicate the GEA and build a solid base for a new, equitable and predictable Foundation Aid initiative forward. Indisputable and critical SSFC data-driven tactics created a climate whereby state government could no longer marginalize the needs of school districts.
- Published on our website all SSFC data analysis that supports our rich, academically comprehensive and detailed account of the recent history of state aid to school districts — with all of the flaws, missteps, incongruence and political machinations that have made it so onerous when compared to the promises of the CFE court ruling and the creation of the Foundation Aid formula.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Accomplishments (continued):

- SSFC efforts directly contributed to motivate an influential group of Senators and members of the Assembly to argue for funding to school districts that were disproportionately impacted by the flawed and discredited GEA formula.
- In the wake of ineffectual and mysterious state aid proposals from the executive and legislature, SSFC turned up the heat which helped lead to an enacted budget that broke the PIT barrier of 3% again with a final tally of direct state aid to schools of ~\$1.4 billion. SSFC initiatives were clearly influential in building momentum that ultimately convinced the Governor and legislature to direct additional funding to GEA restoration and to bolster Foundation Aid.
- SSFC is a founding member of New Yorkers for Students' Educational Rights (NYSER). Under the chairmanship of famed litigator Michael Rebell, NYSER is bringing suit to force NYS to perform an examination of the current Foundation Aid formula as a means to establish an equitable, adequate, and sustainable state public education funding stream as guaranteed by the NYS Constitution. We hope to be in court again in the Fall of 2016.
- Additionally, SSFC joined with NYSER to seek immediate injunctive relief for the instantaneous eradication of the Gap Elimination Adjustment, on constitutional grounds.

Annual Professional Performance Review: SSFC role in a “significant” state aid year is summarized as:

Accomplishments (continued):

- Further, we provided guidance and templates for Long Range Financial Planning by school districts of every size and demographic. Moreover, Comptroller reports have been analyzed and our findings and recommendations disseminated at workshops throughout the state.
- SSFC at every turn held fast to our principles and mission. This was especially true during the final days of the legislative session for 2015-16 state aid. SSFC lead the charge to make it clear that anything but the IMMEDIATE and complete eradication of the GEA was not acceptable. Our partners, the Rural Schools Association, members of REFIT and the Mid-Hudson Study Council provided helpful support in this effort.
- These accomplishments do not happen by accident, or through the wisdom or good will of state government. Our data was and is solid, our rationale persuasive and our demands reasonable. You, in concert with large numbers of stakeholders, motivated the Governor and the State Legislature to produce these victories.

But we are not done yet, not by a long shot...

- Our significant role is undeniable. But it must continue to be a voice for member school districts as the financial future of the state contains some identifiable complications and the financial futures of our member districts will be affected by these state finances easily into the next five years.
- Despite our accomplishments, this school year again poses serious challenges, but we're gearing up to continue our fight for "equity that is based on need, not Zip Code". (The good thing is that other organizations have picked up on that 1995 SSFC catch phrase creation.)
- The current Foundation Aid distribution is a mess. ANY "fix" will take some time, money and resources. There are many who would maintain the status quo and deny equity, fairness and sustainability to those most in need. The next steps will not be easy.
- Due to the complicated nature of the current Foundation Aid formula, the current way it is used compared to the original formula and intent, and the political nature of state aid between a governor and both houses of the state legislature, the amount and distribution of state aid will be volatile and competitive.
- This campaign can't succeed without your continued courage and support. We need to recruit more stakeholders — many more — to our mission for an equitable, adequate, sustainable and predictable state aid agenda.
- You need to reach as many legislators as possible in advance of this especially critical Legislative Session...and we have workshops across the state to assist you. So, let's go!

With the considerable fiscal challenges we all continue to face, we continue to be the biggest bang for your buck through our research and data, tough-as-nails advocacy with Albany leaders and our highly effective workshops, presentations and forums. Our data will exclusively help members and our analysis will include all data from every school district in the state that receives state aid.

“Bad times have a scientific value. These are occasions a good learner would not miss.”
— [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

All of these efforts are focused on shining the light of day on the issues that are vital to you.

SSFC has provided an evidence based rational and analytical clarity to the otherwise “same old, same old” state aid banter we hear from the “same old, same old” folks who have to play the Albany game.

And...

There is still much to do!

“Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional.”
— [Roger Crawford](#)

Major Issues Summary

Formula Considerations

1. Enrollments
2. Adjusted Foundation Aid per TWPU
3. PNI
4. Census Data
5. IWI
6. Regional Cost Index
7. Computation of Local Contribution
8. Unresolved Tax Cap Issues
9. STAR Differentials
10. Politics
11. Media Perception

Other Considerations “four moving parts” of the formula—

1. the cost of a successful education,
2. pupil needs,
3. regional cost differences, and
4. local district fiscal capacity.

Other Considerations

1. Costing out models
2. Escalation of costs
 - a) Contractual
 - b) Non-contractual
3. Student Performance Issues
4. Public Support
5. Competition-
 - a) Inter
 - b) Intra