

## Introduction to *One Island, One Voice* Letter-Writing Campaign to State Legislators and the Governor

### A Message from Dr. Allan Gerstenlauer, Superintendent of Schools

The fight to save our State Aid has begun and we need your help.

Longwood has united with school districts across Long Island in an effort to deliver a message to Albany about the way in which we fund public education. Our ***One Island, One Voice*** campaign will pool the efforts of Long Islanders with a goal of delivering 15,000 handwritten letters to Albany.

We are asking for a few minutes of your time to compose a letter to our State Legislators and the Governor. We recognize that e-mail and form letters are far faster and more efficient, and we encourage you to use those forms of communication. However, our message will be heard more clearly in the form of individualized, handwritten letters. Regardless of the medium, communication is more effective when it is personalized...i.e., what experiences has your child had in school that may be impacted by budget cuts?

DO NOT MAIL LETTERS...bring letters to any of our schools or our District Office no later than **March 12th**. We will be collecting the letters from Longwood residents, just as other districts are doing, and will deliver them in bulk to political leaders in Albany. Albany needs to hear from every facet of our community, not just our immediate school community, so we are encouraging organizations across the Longwood community to organize their groups in this effort.

#### **Please consider the talking points below:**

- The state's formula for funding education does not recognize the high cost of living on Long Island, equating high property values with "wealth" and resulting in an extraordinarily high property tax burden.
- The Foundation Formula does not work for low wealth districts like Longwood:
  - more than one-third of our students receive free and reduced lunch.
  - more than 300 students are homeless, among the highest populations in the state.
- The Governor's Gap Elimination Adjustment builds on the inequities in the Formula, **cutting \$6 million** in school aid from Longwood in 2010-11, which equates to a loss of 84 staff positions, or an intolerable increase in property taxes.
- The Governor's plan to shift a greater share of pre-school and summer school special education costs to local school districts will increase Longwood's 2010-11 expenses by nearly **\$1 million**.
- The fiscal challenges faced by the State and by all New Yorkers are a reality, but it is irresponsible to continually impose the State's fiscal responsibilities onto local property taxpayers.
- It took Longwood more than a decade to recover from the severe and inequitable cuts of the early 90's...an entire generation of students.
- It is essential that legislators work with their colleagues in both the Senate and Assembly and across party lines to support the regional needs of our community.

Dear Governor Paterson:

I am writing as a concerned taxpayer and resident of the Longwood Central School District to ask that you work with the State Legislature to seek a redistribution of resources that provides greater equity across the State and affords property owners such as myself much needed relief. The School District has proposed increasingly lean budgets to minimize tax rate increases, but school costs are only half of the budget equation. The other half is revenues, and when New York State fails to equitably fund its public schools, either more programs are cut, or residents are left to bear the cost through higher property taxes.

Longwood is not a wealthy district. Approximately one-third of our students receive free or reduced lunch, and nearly 300 students are homeless. As a high tax, low wealth district, the Foundation Formula that drives school aid inadequately addresses Longwood's needs in the first instance. The Gap Elimination Adjustment in the Executive Budget Proposal compounds the inequities in aid formulas, cutting \$6 million from our district in 2010-11. That equates to 85 staff positions, a reduction in programs, or an intolerable increase in property taxes. Furthermore, the proposal to shift a greater share of pre-school and summer school special education costs to local school districts will have a dramatic impact on spending.

I recognize the fiscal challenges faced by the State and by all New Yorkers, but ask that proposed cuts be reconsidered. It took Longwood nearly a decade to recover from the severe and inequitable cuts of the early 1990's...an entire generation of our students who lost educational opportunities. I am asking that you work with the Legislature so that scenario does not occur again for the next generation of Longwood students.

Sincerely,

cc: Senator/Assemblyman

Dear Senator/Assemblyman:

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