



West Islip Public Schools
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BERNADETTE M. BURNS
Superintendent of Schools

February 4, 2015

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Release School Aid Runs

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The release of the 2015-2016 Executive Budget Proposal on January 21 contained many new initiatives and reforms. The one thing it did not include was a spending plan for school districts. Within the proposed legislation, the release of additional monies for school districts was tied to the passage of education policy reforms. The proposed state budget technically appropriates an increase of \$1.1 billion for School Aid, but does not include formulas to allocate that increase. Estimates of aid for individual districts have not been provided.

While I will not offer commentary on the proposed policy reforms or the contingency of funding, I am dismayed that district allocations have not been made available. Withholding proposed School Aid distribution from the executive budget makes it virtually impossible for our district to proceed with its own budget development and comply with state laws. **A projected School Aid distribution and corresponding distribution runs for individual school districts must be released immediately.**

The West Islip School District relies on the initial School Aid distribution (“runs”) to develop the district budget for the coming year, and to this end, we have scheduled public meetings in the next few weeks. This process cannot proceed, however, without an expected state aid distribution baseline, as we are left without enough information to predict revenue for the upcoming year. If media reports are correct, and expected runs are not released until April 1, the district’s timeline for school budget development would be impeded. Compressing the timeline would all but exclude the public from critical school budgeting decisions.

Further, under the state’s tax cap levy law, our school district must submit projected levy increases for 2015-16 to the State Comptroller, Department of Taxation & Finance, and the State Education Department by March 1. Without projected state aid, this is operationally unworkable. We must know our projected School Aid distribution in order to comply with the tax cap mandate.

As drafted in the executive budget proposal, if the reforms are not enacted, no district would be allowed any increase in aid over current year levels. With that figure as our only state aid assurance,

our options are (1) steep cuts within a projected budget to ensure expenditures will meet our only known level of revenue, or (2) increasing the local tax levy to a safe level above the cap to compensate for possible lost state aid. Neither of these options is acceptable nor fair to our community.

I therefore implore you to **submit a proposal to allocate the planned \$1.1 billion increase in School Aid** and release the corresponding projected 2015-16 state aid distribution for our school district immediately. This is an imperative that threatens to disrupt government function in our state and our school district as well as cause unnecessary distress in our community, and it cannot continue.

Sincerely,



Bernadette M. Burns
Superintendent

BMB:ped

c: The Honorable Philip M. Boyle
The Honorable Andrew Raia
The Honorable Joseph Saladino