



E-News July 2015

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This Issue:
Tax Relief
Education
Parental Choice Act
Increase Aid for Private
Schools
Geothermal Tax
Exemption

EVENTS:



Dear Friends,

I hope you had an enjoyable Fourth of July celebrating our nation's independence.

This newsletter highlights some of what we accomplished during the 2015 legislative session.

While I am pleased to report the Assembly passed my bill ([A5355](#)) that would appoint a state monitor in East Ramapo, the Senate leadership refused to even bring the same bill ([S3821](#)) to the floor for a vote, failing the public school students of East Ramapo. On Tuesday July 7th, I met with newly-appointed [Education Commissioner, Mary Ellen Elia](#), who said, "No question, we will take action."

Those of us elected to serve in the Legislature are charged with ensuring that the public school students of East Ramapo get the quality education our state constitution guarantees them. I am more determined than ever to work with the Education Commissioner, the State Education Department, and the Board of Regents to provide a reasonable, long term-solution for East Ramapo that will include strong, real time oversight, re-establish trust in the school board while addressing the unique needs within the district. Full statement click [here](#).

~Ellen~

Tax Relief for Middle-Class Families and Seniors

Property taxes make it difficult for many Rockland residents to make ends meet. Property tax rebate checks will put money back in the pockets of hardworking New Yorkers.

- Rebates will be in addition to homeowners' School Tax Relief (STAR) benefits and are contingent upon schools and municipalities staying within the 2 percent property tax cap, which has saved taxpayers over \$7 billion and will be extended for another four years
- Senior citizens in the enhanced STAR program will receive the property tax rebates, which will increase to 34 percent of their current savings over the next four years.
- After the first year, the program will operate like my "circuit breaker" legislation ([A7673](#)) that creates an income-based tax "circuit breaker" that lowers homeowners' tax bills while protecting quality education. The new rebates will be based on a household's annual income for families earning up to \$275,000.
- A program created last year will send a second rebate check in 2016 to residents whose school district and municipality take steps to reduce costs and adhere to the 2 percent tax cap.

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Education Reforms

Addressing the concerns of parents and teachers over testing and evaluation puts the focus back on learning rather than testing. The legislation passed by the Assembly will help teachers better prepare students for certain standardized exams. Also, teachers, principals and superintendents will no longer be required to enter into confidentiality agreements preventing them from discussing the contents of these exams after the exams have been publicly released.

- SED will release significantly more questions and answers from standardized English language arts and math tests used for grades 3 through 8, giving teachers more information they can use in the classroom.
- SED will establish a content review committee to ensure those exams are fair and grade level-appropriate.
- Plans for new teacher evaluations will take into account certain factors that can affect student performance, including poverty, status as an English language learner, disability and prior academic history.

Rejecting the Parental Choice in Education Act

If Governor Cuomo's proposed legislation had passed the full legislature it would have diverted hundreds of millions of dollars in state funding and given huge tax breaks to the wealthiest New Yorkers who made donations to support religious and private schools. While I respect the right of parents to choose the school they feel is most appropriate for their child, I have consistently opposed this legislation. To read more about many of the reasons I voted no click [here.](#)

An Increase in Aid for Nonpublic Schools

An additional \$250 million in funding will be allocated to private and religious schools to cover state-mandated services and help keep the cost of tuition down for working families.

Geothermal Bill Unanimously Passes Full Legislature

My bill ([A5508](#)) will provide a state sales tax exemption for residential and commercial GHP installations, which provide ultra-efficient heating, cooling and hot water for buildings by using the near constant temperature of the ground as a heat source in the winter and as a heat sink in the summer, reducing the need for carbon-based energy sources. By eliminating sales and use tax for both the purchase and installation of geothermal systems, more New York State residents will be able to afford them. Investing in renewable energy is a smart investment - in our children's future and the future of our increasingly fragile planet. The measure will go to Governor Cuomo for his signature.

Improving Early Intervention Program

My bill ([A7554](#)), which passed the full legislature, directs the NY State Commissioner of Health to collect and report data on the early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities for the purpose of improving the program. The New York State Early Intervention Program (EIP) is part of the national Early Intervention Program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. To learn more about the program and services click [here.](#)