



Assemblywoman

Michaelle C. Solages

Continues to Fight for Our Schools

Serving the communities of North Valley Stream, Valley Stream, South Valley Stream, South Floral Park, Floral Park, Bellerose Terrace, North Woodmere, Elmont, Stewart Manor, and parts of Franklin Square.

Spring 2016

Education Newsletter

Dear Families and School Community,

Every day I work to build a stronger New York by identifying what families need to succeed. My utmost priority is to ensure equity and access to opportunities for all families in the district.

We must focus on our schools to create a better New York, and that means providing every child the opportunity to succeed through new and innovative programs. This year, I will continue to support smart and fair reforms to strengthen school aid and our public education system. In Albany, I have sponsored legislation that further supports vital resources for the community and state, which includes:

- **Bill A03401:** Directs the commissioner of education to establish minimum standards for the maintenance and repair of school buildings; eliminates the tax levy cap for expenditures related to school building maintenance and repair.
- **Bill A06629:** Advocates for the creation of an early learning investment commission; provides support for public and private investment in early learning for children up to the age of five.
- **Bill A07225:** Relates to establishing full-service community schools to improve student outcomes through a systematic effort designed to coordinate educational programs with essential health, mental health and enrichment services.

Through many of my education initiatives, I will make sure local schools and parents are heard, and that together we fight for a fair education system for all children. I know the fight is far from over. I will be working with our partners in government to make this a reality – a better and brighter future for our state and for all New Yorkers.

In this newsletter you will discover more information about the education initiatives I've supported in our community, along with information on allocated grants to our schools.

I extend my best wishes to the children and their families for a successful school year, and I thank you for your continued support of our education system. If you have any questions about this newsletter or any other community issue, please don't hesitate to contact my office at 516-599-2972.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michaelle Solages" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon. Michaelle Solages

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OUR STATE, OUR COMMUNITY

During the 2015-16 budget process, Assemblymember Solages helped to secure \$23 Billion for New York Schools – a \$1.6 Billion increase from the prior year. This increase in state aid will provide our students with the resources they need, while lowering the property tax burden. She also assisted in passing legislation that addresses the concerns of parents and teachers over testing and evaluations. The legislation voted on by the State Assembly will help teachers better prepare students for specific standardized exams. “Education should be about what’s best for our children so they can succeed in the future,” stated Assemblymember Solages. “That’s why my Assembly colleagues have consistently pushed to put the emphasis on learning. I urge the New York State Senate to support our bills. I’ll keep fighting for policies that ensure our children receive the best education possible.”



Assemblywoman Solages cares about enriching the lives of all residents in the district, especially our youngest members.

State Financial Support for Public Schools

Assemblymember Solages’ track record reflects continued public education backing through a resolution that urged the US Department of Education not to withhold school funding. “In the past year, there was an increase in the number of parents who opted out of having their children take English Language Arts and Math standardized tests, however Federal Title I states that education funding is tied to these tests. This federal funding provides financial assistance to schools that serve the most disadvantaged and low-income populations,” stated Assemblywoman Solages. “That’s why I helped pass a resolution (K.523) urging the US Department of Education to continue providing vital funding for our schools and not penalize students.”

Assemblymember Solages wants to see funding for Teacher Resource and Computer Training Centers in this year’s state budget restored to its 2008-09 levels of \$40 Million.

The current Executive Budget fails to fund these critical centers for educators, parents and school-related professionals. The Teacher Centers provide professional learning opportunities for educators that contribute to improved student achievement; they are the state-funded vehicle guaranteed to support professional learning in all school districts, which includes over 200 high-need schools/districts and BOCES schools, which further promote family engagement and 21st century learning.

The 2016 Executive Budget proposal includes full funding of expense-based education programs:

- \$266 million in additional support to the Foundation Aid.
- \$189 million to Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) restoration.
- \$18.6 million to satisfy prior year claims.

In the long term, New York State must prioritize the development of a permanent, adequate and equitable funding formula for school aid.

Assemblymember Solages seeks a minimum \$2.3 billion dollar increase in support for public schools in 2016-17. This includes a \$1.5 billion increase in Foundation Aid, the complete restoration of the GEA (\$434 million) and the full funding of expense-based aids. Strong advocacy is needed for state support to districts with enrollment spikes and increased funding to support English language learners.

Property Tax Cap

New York State’s tax cap is much more restrictive than any other state. While some needed reforms have been made, including adjustments for PILOTS and BOCES capital construction, the tax levy limit’s most onerous provision remains.

Assemblymember Solages seeks to:

- Make BOCES exempt to capital expenditures from the cap calculation and include PILOT properties in the tax base growth factor.
- Allow any proposal beyond the capped levy amount to be advanced as a separate proposition requiring majority approval.
- Amend the Property Tax Cap calculation to make allowable growth factor a flat 2%.
- Account for enrollment growth in the calculation.
- Prohibit negative tax caps.

Career and Technical Education

Assemblymember Solages supports different pathways to education concepts, from an aidable cap on BOCES salaries for CTE teachers to simultaneous increases in special services aid for non-component districts, which extend to the Big Five. Students want a head start in learning skills needed for employment and/or more direction in higher education studies. Assemblymember Solages understands that career and technical programs, like Barry Tech in Nassau BOCES, should all be taught in environments that stimulate the real world.

Pre-K

Assemblymember Solages supports amendments to the Executive Budget proposal to expand prekindergarten programs to all districts that wish to offer these services. Rather than limiting expansion to the new three-year-old seats as proposed, Assemblywoman Solages and her colleagues recommend that funding for expiring grant programs as well as all new funding, be transitioned to the current law Foundation Aid formula authorizing all districts to add seats for eligible students. Assemblymember Solages also calls for expenses associated with Pre-K transportation to be funded the same way as all other K-12 transportation.

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Common Core

In 2014, Assemblymember Michaelle Solages called on the State Education Department to delay Common Core test-based assessments for at least two years. The delay was targeted to test-based decisions affecting teachers, students and principals, as well as the sharing of sensitive and private student data with third-party vendors. Despite demanding more from students, Common Core creates concerns for parents that the examinations force students to be assessed on material that they have not yet learned. Educators and parents have advocated for a transition to a different form of universal examination. Assemblymember Solages stated, “We all share the same goals of improving our schools and ensuring that our students learn and succeed. That’s why we need to get this right. Numerous concerns regarding the State Education Department’s roll-out of the Common Core have been raised. While we work to find solutions to these issues, it’s only sensible that we delay use of the Common Core-aligned tests for making high-stake evaluations associated with the new standards.”

The State Department of Education hired a new firm that will utilize teacher input to develop Math and English tests in grade 3-8. Assemblymember Solages believes this will help ensure exams are fair, grade-level appropriate, and a good measure of student performance.

Assemblymember Solages, along with her Assembly colleagues, have interviewed prospective candidates for open seats on the State Board of Regents. She has stated, “The State Board of Regents and the State Education Department should continue developing enriching curricula and provide assistance to local school districts and educators in their efforts to develop effective methods for teaching to students.”

Such actions would lead to robust development in education and an increase in the competency of students to successfully complete and comprehend these examinations.



Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages ensures the best voices and minds are represented on the Board of Regents.

Special Education

The Nassau BOCES Department of Special Education is the premier provider of special education services in the Long Island region, delivering individualized instruction to over 1,800 students at ten Nassau BOCES special education schools throughout the county.

Assemblymember Solages supports diversified special education programs that prepare students for college and career readiness. It is important that students with varying abilities receive care and support through a student-centered environment that empowers them to reach their maximum potential. Nassau BOCES offers a comprehensive array of special education programs specifically designed to meet the requirements of special needs school-age students with moderate to severe learning disabilities, which include emotional, behavioral, physical, vision, hearing, developmental, and all other disability categories. Assemblymember Solages supports school aid that can provide students with the tools to succeed and meet their highest potential.



Assemblywoman Solages successfully secured a grant for Valley Stream 30 School District, which enabled the district to place digital signs in front of their schools.



Assemblywoman Solages visits local schools regularly to impress the importance of reading books and positive leadership.

GRANT ALLOCATIONS: BUILDING BETTER SCHOOLS

Allocating grants to local schools takes top priority. These grants are made possible through collaborative efforts of the New York State Assembly and individual Assembly Members. Assemblymember Solages’ office receives a large number of requests, and she works to assist as many schools and programs as possible.

During the 2015–2016 budget process, Assemblymember Solages secured significant increases in state aid for our schools in the 22nd Assembly District, as well as grants awarded to:

- Valley Stream School District 30: **\$100,000**
- Valley Stream School District 24: **\$130,000**
- Valley Stream School District 13: **\$90,000**
- Valley Stream Memorial: **\$20,000**
(funding for new digital sign)

Most recently the Valley Stream Central High School District received \$20,000 from the New York State Education Department, and this year Valley Stream School District 13 has been approved for a \$32 Million bond.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES: HELPING FAMILIES PAY FOR SCHOOL

New York State STEM Incentive Program

The New York State STEM Incentive Program provides a full SUNY tuition scholarship to the top ten percent of students in each New York State high school if they pursue a STEM degree in an Associate or Bachelor degree program. Students accepted into the program must agree to live in New York State and work in the STEM field in New York for five years after graduation.

To learn more, visit hesc.ny.gov/STEM or call 1-888-697-4372.



Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program helps Students with College Debt

College students who graduated in 2015 represented the most indebted graduates in US history, and student borrowing for higher education continues to rise. While earning a four-year college degree is a wise decision in the long term, student loan payments can be daunting, especially for recent graduates who are still searching for a good job and building a financial foundation. New York State's "Get On Your Feet" Loan Forgiveness Program can help ease that financial stress.

A student may be eligible to have up to two years of federal student loans forgiven if the student graduated both high school and college in New York State, received an undergraduate degree in or after the 2014-15 academic year, and lived in the state for a full year. To be considered, student applicants must also have to be enrolled in either an income based or "pay-as-you-earn" reimbursement program and have an adjusted gross income of less than \$50,000.

What's good for our students is good for our states. The STEM Incentive Program and the "Get On Your Feet" initiative both require its beneficiaries to stay in New York State and contribute their skills to the workforce as soon as they find jobs.

Applications for the "Get On Your Feet" program are now being accepted. Visit hesc.ny.gov or call 1-888-697-4372 to learn more.



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Education Resources:

Nassau BOCES General information • 516-396-2500

Nassau BOCES Department of Special Education • 516-396-2287

College Planning and Career Center • 516-622-6812 / 516-622-6885

Teenage Parenting Program • 516-622-6952

New York State Education Department General Information • 518-474-3852