



September 3, 2020

Dear Saratogian Editor,

As schools reopen over the next few weeks, we truly look forward to our districts' first day of school when we can welcome students back, either in person, or virtually. While it may be different this year, we are all eager to continue educating our students. We recognize the heroic efforts of our teachers and all of our school staff last spring and what they are about to undertake during the new school year.

As we get ready for a return, our communities may not realize that we are at the onset of a very dire situation. In response to the economic downturn and resulting cash flow issues, New York State has started to withhold a portion of state aid payments to our school districts. As of today, we are unsure if these reductions will become permanent, but considering that state aid awards were already flat, and districts are facing increased costs, the potential impact of these reductions could be catastrophic, and could happen soon.

The State Division of the Budget has been very clear that they can not wait for the federal government to act and offset the state's revenue loss — amounting to \$62 billion over four years — and have already lowered state spending by \$4 billion by freezing hiring, new contracts and pay raises, and temporarily holding back a minimum of 20 percent of most payments to localities. Absent significant federal aid to the state and school districts, Governor Cuomo has repeatedly stated that permanent cuts will have to be adopted before the end of the year.

My district, the Hartford Central School District, serves approximately 500 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. As a small, rural district, Hartford is heavily reliant upon state aid to be able to offer an academically rich and supportive student environment. With a budget of just over \$13 million, state aid is the life-blood for the district, as approximately 65% of our revenue comes from state aid. The district prides itself on our financial stewardship and works to ensure a balance between spending and educational opportunities. For comparison purposes, a 1% increase on our tax levy equates to approximately \$34,000. This past year's tax cap limit was 1.74% which allowed the district to increase our tax levy by \$62,783. A 20% reduction in state aid represents a decrease in 12% of our budget and would require significant reductions in student academic programming and the elimination/reduction of jobs across the district.

Districts anticipated a potentially difficult fiscal year and have already reflected cuts in their 2020-2021 approved budgets. For example, Mechanicville City School District (MCSD) cut 14 full time positions, a savings of just over \$1.1 million and over \$50,000 reduction in total expenses from the 2019-2020 approved budget. Facing a potential loss of 20% of state aid would result in a drop in revenue of \$2,537,678. According to the New York State Fiscal Accountability Report Card Summary, the per pupil expenditure for the MCSD during the 2018-2019 school year was \$8,025 as compared to \$11,910 for similar school districts. For a district of 1,354 students they would need to increase spending to over \$5 million annually to be at the average.

Greenwich Central School District reduced its 2020-21 budget by approximately \$700,000 by not filling three teaching positions, cutting most equipment expenses, and significantly reducing supplies and contractual

spending. A 20% state aid reduction would require the district to reduce overall spending by almost \$1,900,000 or an additional \$1,200,000. The only way to balance spending and revenue would be to layoff or reduce staff. Based on the required reductions, this could mean up to 10 or 12 additional staff members.

The 20% reduction in state aid will result in lost revenue totaling approximately \$2 million for the Stillwater Central School District, or almost 8 percent of the district's spending plan. The Corinth Central School District budgeted \$12,800,000 for state aid in the 2020-21 budget which represents 56% of its revenues. A 20% reduction in state aid would equal approximately \$2,560,000, a decrease of 11%. Both districts did not replace several employees who retired.

Reductions, on top of flat funding and extraordinary expenses for PPE and other related costs to reopen schools, have started to create a fiscal crisis for many of our school districts. Above were just a few examples. Federal assistance for the state and for education is needed, now.

Some sectors may be able to wait for federal assistance, but schools cannot. We truly understand that the state is cash strapped and that districts in the region have not been forgotten. However, this has become an urgent matter. Federal assistance for state education is needed. That is why we urge your readers to support their local school districts and to write to US Congress Representatives, Paul Tonko or Elise Stefanik, as well as to Senators Gillibrand and Schumer, and ask them to move along federal relief to New York, our communities and school districts.

Thank you for your support,

Andrew Cook, Chairman of the Chief School Officers Advocacy Committee, Hartford CSD

On behalf of the 31 Superintendent of Schools in the WSWHE BOCES region:

Michael Healey, Argyle CSD	Michael Markwica, Johnsburg CSD
Kenneth Slentz, Ballston Spa CSD	Lynne Rutnik, Lake George CSD
Michael Graney, Bolton CSD	Bruce Potter, Mechanicville City SD
Douglas Silvernell, Cambridge CSD	Timothy Farrell, Minerva CSD
Mark Stratton, Corinth CSD	Christian Fisher, Newcomb CSD
Kevin Froats, Fort Ann CSD	Michele French, North Warren CSD
Daniel Ward, Fort Edward UFSD	Kyle Gannon, Queensbury UFSD
Brita Donavon, Galway CSD	David Glover, Salem CSD
Paul Jenkins, Glens Falls City SD	Michael Patton, Saratoga Springs City SD
Brian George, Glens Falls Common	Ryan Sherman, Schuylerville CSD
Thomas McGurl, Granville CSD	Kristine Orr, South Glens Falls CSD
Mark Fish, Greenwich CSD	Patricia Morris, Stillwater CSD
Beecher Baker, Hadley Luzerne CSD	John Goralski, Warrensburg CSD
Jon Hunter, Interim, Hudson Falls CSD	Patrick Pomerville, Waterford-Halfmoon UFSD
David Snide, Indian Lake CSD	Patrick Dee, Whitehall CSD

James Dexter, WSWHE BOCES, District Superintendent of Schools

