

Budget cuts harm poorest schools

March 22, 2011 by LILO AND GERARD LEEDS



Lilo and Gerard Leeds are co-founders of the [Long Island-based Institute for Student Achievement](#) and of [CMP Media](#), a leading publisher of business-related media which is also based on [Long Island](#).

Gov. Andrew M. [Cuomo](#) wants New Yorkers to believe that money isn't the issue when it comes to providing New York's schoolchildren with a top-notch education, and that New York spends too much to educate its children. Don't believe it.

We know what makes schools successful: setting high standards for achievement and helping all students meet and exceed them; keeping class sizes manageable, with enough teachers and other staff to offer intensive instruction, guidance and support; giving staff and school leadership the opportunity to polish existing skills and develop new ones, and engaging families in the education process.

All these elements of success require dedication, focus and resourcefulness on the part of students, teachers and administrators -- and they require money.

We have lived for many years in [Great Neck](#). Our five children grew up here and went to [Great Neck's](#) outstanding public schools. Voters are justifiably proud of this school system, and consistently approve budgets that ensure our schools have the resources they need to continue to provide high-quality education.

Great Neck, of course, is a well-to-do, prosperous community. In less advantaged, economically stressed communities on Long Island and throughout the state, educators and parents face dwindling resources and are forced to make choices that inevitably have an impact on student achievement. Public schools can and should level the playing field and offer all children an

opportunity to succeed, but it is far more difficult -- if not impossible -- for poorer districts to do so.

That's why we provided financial support for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, which was launched in 1993 to ensure that all schools in the state have the financial strength to offer students a good education. CFE led to a major court victory establishing that the state must increase support for New York City schools. And the legislature determined that other high-needs districts -- including [Brentwood](#), [Central Islip](#) and [William Floyd](#) on Long Island -- should also receive increased funding.

Cuomo's current budget proposal, with dramatic cuts in school funding across the state, represents nothing less than an abandonment of the state's legal, political and moral obligation to CFE -- and to thousands of our young New Yorkers.

New York's tax surcharge on high-income earners, such as us, should be extended, and the revenue generated should be used to meet the obligations of the CFE settlement. Cuomo and Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (R-[Rockville Centre](#)) and his conference are adamantly against extending the surcharge. Although the Senate majority members do support some restoration of education funding, their plan for how to pay for it is questionable. And while Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) and his members include a millionaire's tax in their budget, they don't restore sufficient school funding.

The fact is that struggling, resource-poor schools can be turned around. We founded the Institute for Student Achievement to provide funding and hands-on assistance to transform underperforming high schools into rigorous academic environments that prepare their students for college and careers. Our research-based, accountability-focused approach is working now in schools on Long Island, in New York City and across the country. ISA provides coaches for teachers and principals, college tours, parent outreach and other key ingredients, all of which cost money. The end result: greater achievement and more opportunity for students.

Our society needs to provide schools, from preschool to high school, with the resources they need to help all their students graduate and become productive, fulfilled adults. In the long run, we all benefit by investing in our schoolchildren; well-educated workers are the foundation of a strong, sustainable economy. Gov. Cuomo and the State Legislature need to acknowledge this fact, and fund all our schools accordingly.

[< back to article](#)