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Keep school aid promise, Bonacic urges state

By Hank Gross, Correspondent

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State Sen. John Bonacic, second from right, speaks Monday.

ELLENVILLE - State Sen. John Bonacic on Monday called on the state Legislature to fully fund school aid commitments made last year and restore \$350 million in "foundation aid" to the proposed state budget.

"Foundation aid is the basic category of classroom operating aid," Bonacic, R-Mount Hope, said at a news conference in Ellenville. "I know the economy is soft. I know that this is a tough year, but foundation aid, in education, is the wrong place not to be keeping your promise."

Joining Bonacic at the news conference were Ellenville Superintendent of Schools Lisa Wiles; Carol Slotkin, a board member of the New York State United Teachers union, and Billy Easton, a town of Ulster resident and executive director of the Statewide Alliance for Quality Education.

Easton said the issue is not one of upstate versus New York City in a battle for bucks. "What is good for high-need students, whether in terms of funding, whether in New York City or Middletown or Ellenville, or Rochester, or Buffalo, or rural school districts with high-need students, is the same across the state. This formula which divides money not based on geography but based on students need, is the way to go."

Wiles said her district has faced dire economic times with the closing of major factories. Last year's increase in foundation aid, she said, "enabled us to implement new programs, strengthen existing ones, and keep tax levy increases to zero."

"Every penny in state aid that does not come through as anticipated results in reduced educational opportunity, or higher property taxes," said Slotkin. "The only caps we want to see on people's heads are those that they wear at graduation, and we want to be proud

to see every student be successful in school, every student have the opportunity they deserve, no matter where they go to school."

Bonacic said this is one issue where bipartisanship appears to rule. He noted the Republican Senate and Democratic Assembly have come together in the past to restore cuts in education aid.