



(Times Union staff photograph by Philip Kamrass)

Remember AQE, or Alliance for Quality Education? It's one of several school funding groups, along with Campaign for Fiscal Equity, that have long pushed to get more money in poor, or urban schools. They came to Albany today where they attempted to stage a protest during a Board of Regents meeting. While the approximately 50 protestors were asked to leave the overcrowded meeting room, they held a press conference later and then address Regents members over what they are problems with the state's Contract for Excellence program. Under that Spitzer-era program, 39 districts statewide get extra state aid, but that money must be spent in certain ways such as hiring more teachers to reduce class sizes.

But AQE protestors, who are aligned with the state's teachers unions, say lots of districts have been ignoring the part of the Contracts that call for public hearings on precisely how to spend the extra money.

Actually, they said, only 8 districts, including Syracuse, Middletown, Yonkers and Elmira have provided enough details of their plans to warrant serious public input.

"If parents don't have the information," they can't comment," said Nikki Jones of AQE.

Following a brief march and rally, some AQE members spoke to the Regents, who said they would hold back on issuing the Contracts, which includes the funding, until schools make more allowances for public input.

Update: Two things here, Jones tells me a total of 100 protestors were at the state Education Building, although it's unclear how many were able to squeeze in the Regents meeting room and

Bob Lowry of the state Superintendents Council reminds me that the “extra” money for these districts isn’t so much extra as it is the amount of money prescribed in the state’s school aid formulas, which takes in consideration issues like the need for academic improvement in some schools as well as the ability of districts to raise the money from their tax base.