

Excellent Prospects for Restoring "Academic Excellence" Funds

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Albany, NY - Today's changing of the guard in Albany could mean good news for New York schoolkids, according to education advocates. They're hopeful that incoming Gov. David Paterson will support the restoration of the state's academic "contracts for excellence."

Geri Palast with the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity* says the new leadership could complete the four-year, \$5 billion dollar commitment that she believes was underfunded by outgoing Gov. Eliot Spitzer.

"This year, unfortunately, when Governor Spitzer proposed the budget, he cut the commitment and the promise by \$350 million. We have been working closely with the legislature to ensure that this money gets restored."

Following a lawsuit settlement, Spitzer last year pledged \$1.24 billion for this year's "excellence contracts," but trimmed the amount by \$350 million in his January executive budget proposal.

Palast notes lawmakers have made progress in restoring those funds, thanks in part to public pressure.

"This week the Assembly made major adjustments to ensure that more money is being directed to high-need kids in low-performing schools. They're adding money in other ways to these same kinds of districts."

The excellence contracts require the use of proven teaching methods in 55 low-performing school districts across New York State.

Robert Knight/Craig Eicher, Public News Service - NY