



## The Post-Standard

### It's Time to Act

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The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, the group that won a lawsuit for more funding for New York City schools, seems optimistic - perhaps with good reason.

The group plans to hold a press conference today to outline an agenda that may result in the most concrete results since it began fighting more than a decade ago for equitable state aid for underserved school districts.

CFE says it anticipates that the state Court of Appeals in October will enforce a lower court decision that said the state owed New York City schools billions more in funding to provide the "sound basic education" demanded by the state constitution.

(Gov. Pataki has been able to postpone action on the court ruling through appeals).

The group also will continue to push its September initiative, "Act for Education Month," during which officials and citizens push state lawmakers to pass legislation this year that would address funding disparities throughout the state. Last week, Syracuse Mayor Matt Driscoll, local and state lawmakers and educators gathered to rally for fair funding.

Also, the CFE coalition will call for Pataki's successor - which many believe will be Attorney General Eliot Spitzer - to support the CFE ruling. Spitzer already has.

Of course, if Spitzer wins the election, he will have to face down the state Legislature, which has been slow to embrace the idea that some school districts, including the one in Syracuse, need more money than others.

The Democratic-led state Assembly has supported more equitable funding for schools, but the Republican majority in the Senate has resisted the CFE's decision for various reasons, some of which are credible.

State senators say that state aid to schools has steadily increased over the years. They say districts should be more accountable for the money they spend now. Both statements are true. But Comptroller Alan Hevesi has pushed for greater accountability on school spending, which will make it easier to determine how schools are spending funds. And the need for accountability doesn't negate the need for more money for historically underfunded districts like Syracuse's.

Unfortunately, school funding is a political hot potato that some state lawmakers in wealthier districts want to avoid.

That may be the true reason why the Senate is portraying its objection to the CFE court decision as an Upstate versus Downstate issue, suggesting that only New York City students will benefit from the ruling. The CFE coalition has steadfastly said that its objective is to win fair funding for underfunded schools in the state.

Ultimately, state lawmakers must be held accountable for coming up with a fair school funding formula that ensures that every child - not only those in wealthy school districts - gets a sound, basic education.

It's really their job - not a judge's.

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