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back 

Drive urges reworking school aid

Awareness campaign calls for new approach in distributing funds

By SARAH WORDEN, Special to the Times Union

First published: Tuesday, September 19, 2006

SCHENECTADY -- A monthlong campaign to raise awareness over how state funds for public schools are distributed urges lawmakers to reconsider the distribution.

Mayor Brian Stratton issued a proclamation naming September Act for Education Month in the city in an attempt to question the effects of a lawsuit that forced state leaders to spend more money on New York City schools.

Stratton said the resolution of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit could add \$60 million in state aid to Schenectady City Schools over the next four years. That is the figure included in a proposed settlement of the lawsuit, according to the Alliance for Quality Education, a statewide group that advocates for more school funding.

"Since the Campaign for Fiscal Equity was filed 13 years ago, New York State's courts have repeatedly ruled that the state is failing to provide many of our school children with the kind of quality education our state Constitution requires," Stratton said in a release.

Stratton said the portion of total school funding provided by the state is at its lowest in 50 years, and that shortfall should be solved by adding more state aid for schools rather than increasing local taxes.

While New York spends approximately \$16.3 billion on schools, the Assembly has said it wants an additional increase of \$1.3 billion and the Senate wants \$1.1 billion for schools statewide.

Stratton's proclamation urged residents to participate in the month's observance. "It's creating awareness and urging state leaders to do everything they can," Stratton said. He also said that anyone can call their local legislators and express their support for more funding for districts like Schenectady.

Before this latest effort, Stratton said a campaign similar to that waged by the fiscal equity group may be required to force the state to increase funding to his and other cities.

"We're calling upon our state leaders to reform the school aid formula, provide Schenectady City Schools -- and all of our schools -- the resources that they need and enact a statewide resolution this year," Stratton said in a release. "I hope there's something we can do outside the courts"

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