



## “AQE In Action”

*July 2010*

In January, Governor Paterson proposed a \$1.4 billion public education budget cut—the largest in the history of New York State. A cut of this magnitude would mean that public schools across the state would lose 15,000 teaching positions and hundreds of quality educational programs such as arts education, advanced placement and after school. In March, the Senate voted to support the Governor’s \$1.4 billion cut.

AQE, along with our allies, diligently held meetings with elected officials and organized demonstrations to oppose the budget cut. In late June, the Senate joined the Assembly’s leadership and passed a bill that included \$600 million in restored aid for education but a few hours later that bill was vetoed by the Governor which means that our schools are still facing a pending \$1.4 billion cut. The budget process is not yet completed which means that we can continue to demand restorations so that our children are not deprived of their opportunity to learn.

To avoid the worst case scenario, an override of the Governor’s veto by a two thirds majority vote of the legislature is required. This means that we will need the help of the Senate Republicans. Please click [HERE](#) to send a letter to the entire Senate Republican Conference demanding that they listen to New York voters and restore the critically needed funding to our schools. So far, over 22,000 emails have been sent. Can we count on you to join us?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Billy Easton'.

AQE, Executive Director



## **Rochester gets a new organizer: Welcome Bryan!**

After a long search for a new organizer, Bryan Scrafford has joined the AQE team as an organizer in Rochester. Growing up as the son of an elementary school teacher, Bryan was instilled with a passion for education at an early age and has continued to be a strong advocate for education throughout his life. From 2008 to 2009, he was the lead Virginia organizer on the Working Families Win project where one of the major issues he worked on was ensuring that low income students were receiving the resources that they needed from the local school system.



Bryan has also published entries for *Left of the Hill*, an online blog. During the 2007 Young Democrats of America convention he was a delegate and served on the platform committee. Also noteworthy, he was the Vice-Chair of the Springfield Magisterial District Democratic Committee (2010), Communications Director for the Fairfax County Young Democrats (2008–2010), and served as an advisor to several local and state-wide campaigns (including Morris Meyer for Delegate, Jon Bowerbank for Lt. Governor, and others) focusing on how to expand out-reach efforts by combining online and community organizing. Lastly, he brings with him experience working as a volunteer member of the crew on the *Inside Scoop*, a public access television show.

## **Long Island sends a message to State Senators**

With the state budget arriving late, AQE leaders on Long Island organized to send a message to our local Senators. The ask was for Wall Street bonus taxes instead of forcing cuts on our public schools that would result in cutting teaching positions, full day kindergarten programs, increasing class sizes and other devastating consequences.



Florence Capers, Long Island parent speaking at a public hearing on education cuts.

On Long Island, leaders gathered daily at Central Islip School District during dismissal time to educate families about what the proposed cuts mean. People were determined to get involved and wrote handwritten letters on the spot to Senator Foley asking him to protect our schools. Similar events happened around the state and thousands of letters were collected from concerned community members.

On April 28, Long Island leaders traveled to Albany to take part in a Statewide press conference and delivered the letters to Senator Foley's office. Amparo Sadler read her letter at the press conference to express her concern for her young grandchildren. "We need you to do this for children like my grandchildren who will have bleak future if you allow our district to suffer cuts of over \$6million. My newest granddaughter Kacey is only 13 months old and I worry about what will be left of our schools by the time she is in the district if these cuts happen. Sincerely." Compelling statements like this along with many other actions that have taken place in the last few months to encourage Senator Foley to continue to fight for education and to help get his colleagues on board to restore funding to education in the final budget.

## New York City



With a \$500 million cut looming for NYC schools, the fear of 4,500 teacher layoffs and a 4% across the board cut to school budgets that could decimate public schools, AQE in NYC has been fighting hard to ensure large restorations are made to the proposed education cuts.

Through leafleting, generating calls to legislators, reaching out to different communities, organizing protests and meeting with legislators, AQE in NYC has been pressuring our legislators to listen to the community and to stand up for our children.

Senator Pedro Espada Jr., the Senate Majority Leader, responds to the concerns of a room filled with parent, teachers, community members and

On Saturday, June 5th AQE along with the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, the United Federation of Teachers, as well as other coalition partners came together to organize an Education Political Action Convention. Over 200 parents, teachers

and community members were in attendance, and met with about a dozen Senators to talk about how these cuts would affect their communities and classrooms. The event was a success as it brought Senators face-to-face with their constituents, posing them with a number of questions about what they plan to do to restore this enormous cut and stand up to take the burden of the financial crisis off the backs of our children.

## Faith Based Initiative

On April 28th, 2010 AQE, joined forces with the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice for a press conference followed by a public hearing concerning CEJ's resolution for a [School Transformation Zones and Expanded Learning Time](#) for struggling schools. On the steps of City Hall 100 parents, students, community members, allies, clergy leaders, and elected officials stood in solidarity to support this initiative. On display was a letter of support signed by over 72 city and state elected officials, academics, clergy leaders, parents, advocacy organizations and community members. The Reverend Joade Cardasis, Diocese of NY was one of many speakers at the event.

The event was a follow up to CEJ's "Educational Justice Day in NYC" rally held in January, when the alternative vision of reforming our most struggling schools by redesigning and expanding the school day was first introduced.

On Tuesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the NYC City Council voted unanimously on Resolution 157-A "School Transformation Zone." This was a tremendous victory as 90% of resolutions brought before the city council rarely get voted on, and almost none pass unanimously. The support from parents, community members and clergy leaders from across the city were instrumental in helping to elevate this alternative vision to address the problems in our schools instead of closing them. AQE continues to engage the faith based community in the educational justice movement to help ensure that the vision of making all schools great schools will become a reality.

For information to join the movement for educational justice, contact Zakiyah Ansari at 212 328 9266 or email [zakiyah@aqeny.org](mailto:zakiyah@aqeny.org).

**Syracuse: Families protest  
against cuts to their kids' schools!**

Parents, grandparents, and retired teachers were outraged with the proposed cuts to education. They decided to take to the streets to inform other community members of the devastating consequences of the proposed \$11 million cut to Syracuse schools, and ask others to call Senator Valesky and ask him to stand up for the schoolchildren of Syracuse. The Syracuse schools stand to lose 200 education positions and face the potential loss of important programs. They gathered at local supermarket to hand out flyers, and held signs getting community members to call Senator Valesky and urge him to protect public education from cuts.



Gerald Lotierzo & Phyllis Lee, retired teachers in Syracuse holding signs saying "NO" to the proposed education cuts by the Senate asking people to call Sen. Valesky to demand that he stands up for our schools! (June, 2010)

**Buffalo: Making our leaders experts!**



Bryon McIntyre, member of AQE Buffalo during small group strategizing.

In May of 2010 members of AQE Buffalo traveled to Kerhonkson NY, for the Citizen Action of New York leadership development conference. AQE local and statewide committee members including Bryon McIntyre (pictured) participated in the education learning track which included information gathering, planning, brainstorming and strategizing for the work ahead both statewide and locally. Participants were able to exchange ideas and view points with advocates from other regions such as New York City, Syracuse, and Rochester. AQE Buffalo participants walked away with clear plan for the next steps for the turnaround/transformation schools in Buffalo.

## Surveying parents of students in closing and co-located schools



In addition to working on the budget, AQE is writing a report about the New York City school closings. AQE took part in a lawsuit that argued that the NYC Department of Education had violated provisions of the school governance law. We wanted to look at parents' experiences and thoughts on the new public participation requirements, so we designed a survey to get their feedback. So far through visits to schools, phone calls and email distribution, AQE organizers in New York City and members from the Office of the Public Advocate have collected over 1,000 surveys! Feedback from parents gives us a good idea about how people feel about the process and the proposals affecting their children's education. Look for our update on our school closing report in the next newsletter!

## Transformation or Turnaround schools

Turnaround or transformation schools are schools that have the lowest state test scores and graduation rates under 60%. These schools make up the bottom 5% of all schools in the nation. Each of these schools will get up to \$2 million each year for three years to implement one of four options: turnaround, transformation, restart, and closure model.

What is happening with our transformation schools?

Since the State Education Department publicized its list of "turnaround schools" back in January 2010, the Alliance for Quality Education has been working to inform communities and families on the issue. We met with the Senior Deputy Commissioner and his top key staff and demanded that the State Education Department holds a public comment process separate from the process school districts were following. Unfortunately, SED did not accept our proposal, signaling that it is only willing to follow the minimum requirements of the School Improvement Grant Process regarding stakeholder participation. In addition, the Department's rejection of our proposal casts serious doubt on the value the Board of Regents, the Commissioner and the Senior Deputy Commissioner stance on family involvement and engagement.

We, however, are not discouraged and have continued to work on the issue to make sure that all families, parents, and community members are not only aware of transformation schools, but also are knowledgeable and engaged. To this point, we have had meetings with parents and community members in Buffalo and in Syracuse. We also plan to hold similar meetings with families in Rochester. Through our partner organizations in New York City we supported the creation of the School Transformation Zone where struggling schools can have sustainable turnaround by including parents, teachers, and students in the process and ensuring changes in instruction as well as providing services for the whole student.

Click [HERE](#) for AQE's proposal. Click [HERE](#) for SED's response.



***Make a donation today***

*All children in New York State deserve a quality education. Help make this right a reality by clicking the envelope to donate.*

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Your gift will support our successful work to win funding to reduce class size, expand pre-kindergarten, and provide essential education services for millions of New York children. Our organizing and advocacy has shown proven results: millions of dollars in funding, while holding education officials accountable for how the money is spent. Your gift will enable us to educate the public, involve parents and community members, and inform our elected officials.

Your donation today will help give every student the opportunity to learn. Donations will be used to fund advocacy as well as media relations to keep education issues in the news and at the forefront of statewide issues. No matter the amount, each donation makes a difference. Please make the choice to make a difference by giving now.



**Get involved.** Contact your regional office:

Albany **518-465-4600**  
Buffalo **716-855-1522**  
Long Island **516-541-1006**  
New York City **718-222-1089**  
Rochester **585-288-4693**  
Syracuse **315-435-2480**

We welcome your feedback on both the newsletter and our work! Please send comments to Nikki Jones, Communications Coordinator: [njones@aqeny.org](mailto:njones@aqeny.org)