

Re: Weber-Brabenec Opinion Piece in Lohud.com

There is a new proposal to get New York State to pay 100% of the costs of school busing in school districts in which 25% of the students attend private school. The proposed law was introduced by State Senator Bill Weber and Assemblyman Karl Brabenec, who was my opponent on the 2022 election for state assembly for the 98th Assembly District. It clearly is a bald faced attempt to cut or freeze property taxes for East Ramapo residents. No such plan was offered for any of the other districts in Rockland County.

None of us should be fooled into thinking this would improve public education in East Ramapo in any way. Not even taxpayers would be helped in any significant way. Voters and taxpayers should note that the proposal it would merely transfer the cost of busing costs from the local district to the state and does not include any directive of how these savings could be used. Can they be used for tax cuts or multiple year tax freezes? There is no mandate that they can't be used for these purpose.

Most important to me, the public school students, including those of East Ramapo, are not guaranteed to benefit by these savings. Will we once again see Advanced Placement courses offered to the public school students of East Ramapo as occurs in every other school district in New York State? No, because the school board will direct that the savings be used to cut taxes instead of to support the kids of East Ramapo.

This legislation has virtually no chance of passage in the New York State Legislature but it make us feel good and makes us admire our two GOP State Legislators who will campaign on the bill.

I offer instead a real proposal that would have the potential to help all school districts in our county or in any other county and would, if adopted at the county level, guarantee that the public school students of East Ramapo and those of other similarly situated school districts across New York State would once again be getting the kinds of educational upgrades that are taken for granted in school districts across the State. All school districts would get their share of the additional funds.

Permissive legislation could be passed that permits counties to adopt an extra sales tax from $\frac{1}{4}$ % to 1% in $\frac{1}{4}$ % increments as determined by the County Legislature in each county with all of the money to be transferred directly to the School Districts proportionally, based on the school aged population of each district. This would mean a bump for school districts like East Ramapo.

There would be a mandate that there be maintenance of effort on the tax side, meaning that no school district could take this money and cut the revenue in the first year of funding or a later year's property taxes using extra or saved revenue from the new tax (but property taxes could be flattened, in the discretion of each school board). The use of the additional funds can be determined by each School Board in Rockland but the use is limited to benefit of the public school children within their district. As sales tax usually grows every year, the real value of a districts funds can be maintained or even go up.

Lastly, in districts with a state appointed Monitor, the monitor would determine the use of the funds for that district, not the school board.

In our current system of annual votes on budgets that must be put forth by the school board and voted on by local residents, this would create a regular, reliable source to funds to ensure educational equity in Rockland County, no matter how the population of a district changes over time.

Instead of gimmicky proposals like that of Senator Weber and Assembly Member Brabenec, my plan would provide a continuous and fair use of local tax dollars that will improve the education of every child in Rockland County and, perhaps in part, stabilize school property taxes for all of us.

Bruce M. Levine
Former Rockland County Legislator