



# Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District

Office of the Superintendent

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To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sabatino Cimato and I am the Superintendent of the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District. With approximately 6,500 students, Ken-Ton is the fourth largest school district in the eight counties of WNY and the 18th largest of more than 500 school districts in Upstate NY. Our community is a first-ring suburb of Buffalo encompassing 17.1 square miles with a population of approximately 67,000 people

School districts such as Ken-Ton face serious challenges from rising costs driven by inflation and the increased needs of students, including significant increases in our special education population. Our ability to meet these rising costs depends on levying taxes, which is capped at approximately 2 percent per year, and state aid. Our community is diverse, ranging from newcomers to our country to a blue-collar working force that has well established roots in Ken-Ton. Because of the rising cost of living, the Foundation Aid formula has become even more impactful on our ability to serve the students of our community. For these reasons, we were encouraged when the governor announced that Foundation Aid would be studied as part of the 2025 NYS Budget.

The formula hasn't changed in 10 years and it has taken that long to fully fund school districts. Ken-Ton has undergone many changes. Our schools have become a central hub that families look to for assistance they need. Additionally, society has dictated that school systems be more responsible for the safety, security, and success of the future generation. The need for student intervention as well as supports due to the ongoing mental health crisis require new and innovative programming that Ken-Ton has been at the forefront of providing.

Beginning with a safe school environment, we have strategically focused on proactive vs. reactive security measures. This includes changes to our facilities and procedures while maintaining a welcoming environment. Simultaneously, our responsibility to ensure an equitable, high-quality education has been our priority. We have offered new and innovative instructional programming that includes acceleration as well as targeted intervention. The Governor's priority to fully fund Foundation Aid over the last two years has empowered our district to meet these needs despite the economic challenges our community faces.

For example, our Big Picture Program is a unique Gr. 7-12 framework where students experience success in a non-traditional environment. By focusing on small class advisories, project-based learning, and internships, Big Picture typically sees a 100% graduation rate. In recent years, we have doubled the size of this program. Additionally, we were able to create our new Crossroads Academy, which is specially designed for students who are overaged and significantly undercredited by 11th grade. In its first year, Crossroads Academy celebrated 13 graduates who would not have met graduation requirements in a traditional setting. Reductions in Foundation Aid funding would result in cuts to programs such as these in order to remain under the Tax Cap.

We understand the need to revise the formula by updating outdated components and ensuring greater transparency. In Ken-Ton, student enrollment has stabilized and is even growing, but it is evident that we must continue to find innovative ways to provide our students with multiple pathways to graduation. We cannot support changes to the Foundation Aid formula which would jeopardize student learning.

Sincerely,

Sabatino Cimato  
Superintendent of Schools

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*The Ken-Ton school community will provide our students with the supports, tools and diverse opportunities needed to meet the challenges of an ever changing world.*