

City Council Education Speak Out

Tuesday, April 23, 2002

I'm Ed Westley Vice President and Chairperson of the Education Committee for the Queens Civic Congress. Thank you Councilmember Moskowitz for calling this forum and providing this opportunity to speak. I would also say to the entire City Council: You correctly make Education the number one priority.

As an umbrella group of 100 civic organizations, the Queens Civic Congress membership represents almost every community in the borough

School funding concerns the Queens Civic Congress. City and State budget cuts require the Chancellor to cut out approximately a half a billion dollars for the next school year, September 2002 to June 2003. This is serious money to find without affecting our children in the classroom. New York City schools serve 38% of the New York State school population and receive 36% of the budget. We agree with Governor George Pataki, when he said, "throw out the existing school aid formula ...to achieve equity." The state must drop its appeal of State Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse decision declaring the state's school funding system inequitable and unconstitutional

The Governor and our Legislative leaders must develop a fair financing plan. The 2000 census demonstrated a 14% increase in Queens County, which must be taken into account in developing the state budget.

Over the last year, modest progress was made in building new schools and making additions to existing schools for Queens, including: completed construction of two new schools and four school additions, and twelve new schools and seven school additions are in construction.

The QCC finds after school programs vitally important because 26% of our students come from single-parent households, and 40 % from households where both parents work outside the home. The most recent statistics demonstrate our students get into trouble between the hours of 3:00 – 8:00 p.m.

The QCC supports Borough President Helen Marshall in making education a top priority. Education in our borough offers an example of what can be done when teachers, parents, administrators, community leaders, and children work together.

Overall education funding needs to rise to a level that ensures our children receive the best education possible. Take care to ensure that no cuts in education reach schools and classrooms. All analyses of educational outcomes show better results with smaller classes and the addition of programs in music, sports, and the arts. Monies anticipated as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit must supplement, not replace, any current funding. Limited funds to build schools make it imperative to work to site them where needed.

Therefore, the Queens Civic Congress recommends the following:

- 1) Implement a fair New York State financing plan.
- 2) Reduce school overcrowding by building new schools.
- 3) Implement the building-by-building maintenance plan.

I have copies of our full Education platform, which includes fifteen specific recommendations available for your consideration.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Edwin O'Keefe Westley, QCC Vice President and Education Chairperson