

# THE STATEWIDE SCHOOL FINANCE CONSORTIUM

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## **SSFC Responds to Initial Recommendations Of New NY Education Reform Commission**

*Schools need REAL solutions to survive, both fiscally  
and educationally, says Dr. Rick Timbs*

The preliminary report of the New NY Education Reform Commission, released today in Albany, does not address the disparate financial challenges pressing school districts across New York State. “The emphasis on increased efficiency and effectiveness of student performance has merit, but the pressing fiscal issues that hinder improved student performance initiatives did not receive the comprehensive and timely consideration they require,” said Dr. Rick Timbs, Executive Director of the Statewide School Finance Consortium.

SSFC considers omissions in the report to be a setback to low-wealth, high-need school districts across the state – and is disappointed that no mention is made of taking steps to fix Albany’s highly flawed and inequitable system of delivering state aid to schools.

“If we had all the time in the world, these recommendations would be a great start,” said Dr. Timbs. “Unfortunately, we don’t. These recommendations, though well meaning, don’t move the ball far enough down the field to stop the increased slide of these districts into fiscal and programmatic insolvency.”

Public education is – and has been – in crisis since before Governor Cuomo took office two years ago. The governor, who calls himself “a lobbyist for students,” promised to do what is necessary to provide our students with a quality education that prepares them to perform and compete in a global economy.

There is no evidence from today’s report that the commission grasps the dire fiscal challenges endured by many school districts every day in an effort to improve student performance. Current State support for school districts is complex, inequitable and insufficient. Absent thoughtful and quick solutions to secure sufficient funds for average and below average wealth and high need school districts, fiscal and educational insolvency will take hold before any of the commission’s recommendations can be acted on.

We repeat our stated position calling on the formation of a new or repurposed commission – a panel similar to the state’s Medicaid Redesign Team, whose members have hands-on experience in public education finance and related issues.

This panel should propose legislation for:

- reallocation of all available resources to eliminate the inequitable and crippling Gap Elimination Adjustment cuts
- the creation of an equitable Foundation Aid formula for 2014-15
- additional funds to support school district mergers and regional high schools
- additional funds for pre-kindergarten programs
- the elimination or reduction of cost drivers that impede the mission of school districts

“It is no secret that there are gross inequities in aid cuts and in the distribution of aid to school districts,” said Dr. Timbs. “The more than 400 school districts that make up the SSFC need SOLUTIONS to stem the massive aid cuts they have endured in recent years -- cuts that deny children a sound, basic education. They need solutions like an end to state-created funding cuts, increased mandates and changes to the Foundation Aid Formula -- changes that would distribute aid based on need, rather than politics.”

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SSFC Executive Director Dr. Rick Timbs is available to speak with reporters and editors. Contact him at [rtimbs@statewideonline.org](mailto:rtimbs@statewideonline.org) or call Margaret McCormick at 315-373-8047 to arrange an interview.

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The Statewide School Finance Consortium (SSFC) is an organization of 413 New York public school districts whose mission is to bring equity to the distribution of New York State educational aid. SSFC membership is largely comprised of school districts from average and low-wealth communities that receive a disproportionate share of state funding in comparison to high-wealth regions of New York. The reform of the state aid process will help ensure that all of New York's children receive the same educational opportunities regardless of the wealth or location of their community.

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