



LONG ISLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL



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REQUEST FOR COVERAGE

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Long Island Regional Planning Council Takes Action to Address Educational Achievement and Costs

The LIRPC and its Education Working Group announces a Plan of Action to address educational achievement and cost containment in the K-12 system, the first work product of the LI 2035 Regional Comprehensive Sustainability Plan

Who: The LIRPC and its Education Working Group comprised of representatives of the Nassau Suffolk School Boards Association, Nassau School Superintendents Association, Suffolk School Superintendents Association, Nassau BOCES, Eastern Suffolk BOCES, Western Suffolk BOCES, NYSUT, the New York State United Teachers, members of the Regional Planning Council and its Leadership Advisory Cabinet.

What: For the first time on Long Island, the LIRPC has brought together School Boards, School Superintendents, BOCES and NYSUT to reach consensus on action to maintain and improve academic achievement and assure equal education opportunities for all in the K-12 system, while containing costs to ease the property tax burden. In this initial element of its Sustainable Strategies, the LIRPC recognizes that for Long Island to thrive we need a consistently high quality and affordable public education system that provides equal opportunity for success to all students. The collaboration of the Education Working Group will continue to implement and monitor the success of the action items. The Group will also serve as a model for other working groups to develop action plan in each of the thematic areas of the Sustainability Plan.

When: Thursday, October 28, 2010
12:00 pm to 1:00 pm Press Conference

Where: Nassau BOCES
Lupinskie Center
One Merrick Avenue
Westbury, NY



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PRESS RELEASE

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Long Island Regional Planning Council Takes Action on Educational Achievement and Costs

October 28, 2010 – Today the LIRPC along with its Education Working Group, comprised of representatives of the Nassau Suffolk School Boards Association, Nassau School Superintendents Association, Suffolk School Superintendents Association, Nassau BOCES, Western Suffolk BOCES, Eastern Suffolk BOCES and NYSUT, the New York State United Teachers, for the first time on Long Island announce consensus on A Plan of Action for maintaining and improving academic achievement and assuring equal education opportunities for all in the K-12 system, while containing school costs to ease the property tax burden.

Long Island is known for its high-performing schools, although it is widely recognized that high education achievement is not universal. The reality remains that education and educational opportunities are not the same in all school districts. Individuals and companies are attracted to our region because of the reputation of our high achieving public schools. At the same time, our region is burdened by some of the highest property taxes in the nation, the majority of which can be attributed to financing our schools. Long Island cannot thrive as a region without a high quality and affordable public education system that offers an equal opportunity for success for all students.

The Actions presented start off with a bold initiative to elevate achievement in Long Island's persistently lowest achieving school districts that are currently producing students unable to realize their potential. To achieve the desired results, the Actions call for building on regional resources such as BOCES, as well as regional distribution of the school portion of commercial property taxes from new significant projects.

In a major shift in planning policy, the Actions establish a collaboration between and among school districts and the school community to actively support the development of workforce housing options which include a variety of types and prices. This change in policy is a result of the school community recognizing that multi-family housing developed using recognized planning standards can have a positive tax impact on school districts, while reducing the number of children coming into the district.

With respect to containing costs, the Actions call for funding or rescission of unfunded mandates, incentivizing consolidation of school districts, reforming and supplementing the States foundation formula funding, as well as a comprehensive assessment of the NYS Retirement System and consideration of alternatives to the current NYS Health Insurance Program.

The Actions also call for transforming schools into multi-functioning neighborhood centers, expanding secondary school offerings using technology and consideration of the feasibility and potential advantage of a regionalized employment structure providing for regional collective bargaining for school district employees.

The Actions presented are an outcome of the collaborative work of the LIRPC and its Education Working Group, and are presented as the initial element of the Council's LI 2035 Regional Comprehensive Sustainability Plan, which will present Sustainable Strategies in Tax and Governance, Economy, Infrastructure and Equity.

Most importantly, the members of the Education Working Group will continue to monitor and assess the outcome of the Actions. The Education Working Group will also serve as a model for achieving consensus on Action items in the other thematic areas of the Sustainability Plan.

"Long Island's public education system is one of the Island's strongest assets and one of the Island's greatest challenges. A major key to the Island's long-term sustainability will be our ability to provide a quality education for all our young people at a cost which is affordable to our taxpayers," said John D. Cameron, Jr. Chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Council.

"We are encouraged and excited that our Working Group came together with A Plan of Action to improve educational achievement, provide equal educational opportunity and contain costs," said Michael E. White Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. "There were times in the process where it seemed the diverging perspectives might prevent this success. Instead, collaboration and common interest prevailed to present concrete steps that will lead to needed change."

"The strength of our region is closely linked to the strength of our public schools. Implementation of the recommendations resulting from this collaborative effort with the Long Island Regional Planning Council will result in innovations that will improve school operations and enhance educational opportunities for Long Island's students," said Gary Bixhorn Chief Operating Officer of Eastern Suffolk BOCES.

"In more than 30 years in analyzing public policy initiatives, I have never seen one in which all the influential sides of the issues meeting for months to create a consensus for change," said Lawrence Levy, Executive Dean of the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University, who participated in the process as a consultant. "Imagine people from labor unions, elected school boards, superintendent associations, and a regional planning group with representatives from business, the counties, towns and villages – all with their own political and professional points of view – but all coming together to agree on a plan to confront complex and controversial issues that normally separates them. Well, you don't have to imagine. It happened. And it's a process that could be emulated across a broad front of issues."

"I have been following the development of the "Plan of Action" and believe it to be one of the most fair, pragmatic and comprehensive reports on maintaining the balance between quality education and containment of costs. I wish to congratulate the Education Working Group for putting together such a relevant and well thought out document that will serve Long Island as we face a difficult economic future. I also want to commend leaders of the Long Island Regional Planning Council for making educators part of the problem-solving process. The "Plan of Action" shows what can be accomplished when we enlarge the table to include all perspectives on such an important regional, state and national issue", said Anthony Annunziato Superintendent of Schools, Bayport-Blue Point Public Schools.

"As President of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents, it is my pleasure to endorse the action plan developed by the Education Working Group of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. The action plan addresses many important challenges and puts forth strategies which are practical and realistic. I thank the leaders who came together and worked tirelessly to create this ambitious Plan of Action," said Ranier W. Melucci Superintendent of Schools, Merrick UFSD.

"For too long, this Long Island's focus and strength has been dissipated by a lack of coordination among the many fine organizations that represent diverse interests. Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association is pleased to have been included in the Long Island Regional Planning Council's effort to unite behind a number of initiatives that recognize this region's economic vitality is dependent upon maintaining excellent schools while containing costs" said Mary Jo O'Hagan Vice President of Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association.

"Historically, the majority of the African American and Latino students on Long Island has been denied access to high quality public school education. Housing discrimination and the multiplicity of school districts have created a structure of segregated and unequal schools. Regrettably, the State and local political and education infrastructure has allowed this travesty to remain in place for far too long. Under the leadership of the Long Island Regional Planning Council, I am encouraged that change is possible when a diverse coalition of stakeholders are willing to take concrete and significant steps that will undo the web of structural racism that has gripped the region's school system. I applaud the members for their hard work and persistence," said V. Elaine Gross President of ERASE Racism.

"The LI education community in collaboration with the LIRPC has demonstrated a commitment to addressing and offering solutions to the critical issue of sustainability of living on LI. In the interest of Long Island students receiving quality educations and containing costs for LI taxpayers, we have worked together since last spring to develop comprehensive, positive actions. Our public schools are an integral component of the Long Island economy. We have developed positive strategies to enhance and improve our already outstanding Long Island public schools, as well to improve our consistently low-performing schools while addressing the level of property taxes on Long Island. Throughout the process, we have overcome many major obstacles and differences of opinion by engaging in open and frank discussions. Our mutual efforts, yielded the LIRPC Education Working Group's "Plan of Action", which provides a vehicle through which we believe we can successfully address our goals. We are hopeful that our future collective efforts will continue to be productive as the "Plan" moves forward."
Dianne Hettrich, Vincent Lyons, Kenneth Ulric of NYSUT

Note: Having reached consensus on the Strategy and a Plan of Action, it is expressly understood that the input from the members of the Education Working Group presented to date is limited to the development of the Strategy and the 12 Actions proposed and that the members of the Group reserve comment on the forthcoming LI 2035 Regional Comprehensive Sustainability Plan.



LONG ISLAND REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL



A Plan of Action The Education Working Group

STRATEGY

Maintain and Improve Academic Achievement and Assure Equal Education Opportunities for All in the K-12 System, While Containing School Costs to Ease the Property Tax Burden

CONTEXT

Long Island is known for its high-performing schools, although it is widely recognized that high education achievement is not universal. The quality of education and educational opportunities are not the same in all school districts resulting in Long Island having some of the highest achieving schools and some of the persistently lowest achieving schools within the State. Individuals and companies are attracted to our region to a great extent because of the reputation of our public schools. At the same time, our region is burdened by some of the highest property taxes in the nation, the majority of which can be attributed to the school component. Long Island has a high tax reputation that poses a severe impediment to job retention and creation and forces many of our young families to leave the region.

Long Island cannot thrive as a region without a quality and affordable public education system that offers an equal opportunity for success to all students, regardless of race, socio-economic status, community resources or learning abilities.

The goal of the Actions below is to increase academic performance and educational opportunities for all as well as contain costs by building on regional resources and authorities—such as Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (“BOCES”). We recognize that long-standing structures and practices have contributed to racial segregation and concentrations of poverty, leaving certain communities with greater educational burdens and fewer resources to deal with them. The Council urges that a consensus be reached on regional solutions that can be employed as soon as possible to help all school districts overcome systemic impediments to improving the success of all students and easing the property tax burden.

ACTIONS

- 1) Focus the Long Island region’s collective resources, its political muscle, fiscal might and educational expertise on elevating achievement in its persistently lowest achieving school districts that produce students unable to realize their potential and closing the achievement gap among Long Island school districts to enhance our region’s performance. In order to achieve the desired results, this initiative provides consideration of the following options: creating equal educational opportunities between and among school districts by the promotion of collaborative initiatives involving BOCES, institutions of higher education, groupings of local school districts and other cooperative regional assets; application of the “Distinguished Educator” provision of the State Education Law; utilization of available data measuring educational outcomes along with establishing appropriate educational achievement

and disparity indices to assess and monitor progress in closing the existing achievement gap among school districts and assure resources be directed to school districts to address disparities and inequalities in educational opportunities; seeking a regional solution as preferable among potential options in the event a change in governance of a school district is contemplated or required; and "regionalization" of the school portion of the commercial/industrial and utility property tax base using a phase-in approach for "Projects of Regional Significance".

- 2) Pursue State legislation that requires either funding or rescission of unfunded State imposed mandates on our school districts, over and above Federal requirements. The goal of this Action is to promote improved opportunities and outcomes for all students and contain unnecessary costs by introducing objective standards and flexibility in the application of such requirements.
- 3) Replace or expand secondary school course offerings using technology to more efficiently and cost effectively deliver teaching services, as a way to help all school districts meet student needs and educational goals.
- 4) Promote initiatives to restructure Long Island high schools to optimize student opportunities and maximize return on educational investment, with specific consideration of expanding BOCES offerings and creating programming partnerships including internships with Long Island colleges and universities as well as business, labor, trade councils and large employers. The goal of this Action is to provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum for all students, to include assessment of student knowledge to measure academic and career paths in an effort to maximize the regional K-12 education experience.
- 5) Pursue State legislation to further incentivize consolidation of school districts where appropriate. Provide regional and local data to support such initiatives while also securing adequate funding in the form of "transition and reorganization incentive aid" to facilitate such efforts. The goal of this initiative is to improve educational opportunities and providing equitable access to quality education to all students on Long Island, as well as achieving long-term cost savings.
- 6) Petition the New York State Comptroller to provide a comprehensive assessment of the New York State Retirement System with the prime directive of controlling its cost to Long Island school districts and local governments, as well as allowing establishment of appropriate reserves to sustainably fund mandated retirement expenses.
- 7) Work with local governments, school district representatives, BOCES and State government officials to explore and assess alternatives for Long Island school districts and local governments to the current New York State Health Insurance Program coverage for public employees; acknowledge the value of school districts and local governments which have required contribution from employees for health insurance premium costs, encourage more to do so and foster continued work from all to contain health benefit costs.
- 8) Reform and supplement the State's foundation formula funding to provide equitable distribution of State education aid to Long Island schools to close the gap of government funding and resources among school districts by recognizing , among other things, regional cost and wealth differences.

- 9) Investigate the feasibility and the potential advantage of a regionalized employment structure providing for regional collective bargaining for school district employees for the purpose of achieving cost savings and equitable access by all school districts to the most qualified and experienced personnel.
- 10) Transform schools into multi-functioning neighborhood centers so schools can further maximize return on educational investment and receive financial reimbursement, creating more opportunities for collaboration with local government, organizations and institutions to more efficiently deliver additional services. These services should include expanding adult education and vocational training as well as health care and nutrition programs. Encourage support for regional grant applications seeking funds to implement such initiatives.
- 11) Establish a collaboration between and among school districts, to include school boards, superintendents, administrators, teachers, parents and communities to actively work to support development of workforce housing options which include a variety of types and prices. Advance the development of rental and multi-unit housing demonstrated to be tax positive to school districts and in locations where the existing or improved infrastructure can support such developments. Recognize the fact that such housing options are an essential ingredient for retaining and attracting a strong and diverse workforce while also increasing our tax base.
- 12) The Long Island Regional Planning Council and its Education Working Group will collaborate to implement regional strategies through Actions as provided herein to maintain and improve educational outcomes, increase school district revenues as well as contain costs. This implementation will include development and use of objective metrics to evaluate the outcomes and assess success of these Actions and provide the results of such evaluation in the content of an annual progress report. To the extent that after two (2) years hence these and related Actions do not create adequate results, other and additional area appropriate measures will be presented as part of the solution for Long Island to improve educational opportunities and achievement for all students and control school costs.

Note: Having reached consensus on the Strategy and Plan of Action, it is expressly understood that the input from the members of the Education Working Group presented to date is limited to the development of the Strategy and the 12 Actions proposed and that the members of the Group reserve comment on the forthcoming LI 2035 Regional Comprehensive Sustainability Plan.

Education Working Group

Anthony Annunziato	Superintendent, Bayport-Blue Point Public Schools
Gary Bixhorn	Chief Operating Officer, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
John D. Cameron	Chairman, LIRPC
John Cape	Director, State Strategic Consulting/PFM Group
Wendell Chu	Superintendent, East Islip School District
Lorraine Deller	Executive Director, Nassau Suffolk School Board Assoc.
Brad Friedman	Senior Managing Consultant, PFM
Hank Grishman	Superintendent, Jericho Public Schools
Elaine Gross	President, ERASE Racism
Richard Guardino	VP Business Development, Executive Dean Breslin Ctr, Hofstra and LIRPC Member
Dianne Hettrich	Board of Directors ED 23, NY State United Teachers
William Johnson	Superintendent, Rockville Centre Public Schools
Lawrence Levy	Executive Dean of the Center for Suburban Studies, Hofstra Univ.
Cara Longworth	Deputy Director, LIRPC
Vincent Lyons	Suffolk Regional Director, NY State United Teachers
Ranier Melucci	Superintendent, Merrick Public Schools
Mary Jo O'Hagen	Vice President, Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Assoc.
Thomas Rogers	District Superintendent, Nassau Boces
Kenneth Ulric	Board of Directors ED 17, NY State United Teachers
Michael E. White	Executive Director, LIRPC

