



Hamburg Central School District

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
Administration Building
5305 Abbott Rd.
Hamburg, NY 14075-1699
Phone: (716) 646-3200 ext. 7220

Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

April 23, 2020

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

As the Superintendent of Schools for the Hamburg Central Schools, I am proud of all that we have done to achieve our District Vision of “educating modern thinkers who create, care, solve and discover.” However, I fear that the progress that we’ve made to help our young people become modern thinkers who solve the complex challenges of their day, may fall victim to the problems of this day. I am extremely concerned about the future impact on public education in New York resulting from the fiscal catastrophe this crisis has created for the overall state budget. We deeply appreciate your efforts to enact the CARES Act, which has thus far enabled our state to authorize a budget which essentially freezes its support for our public schools. We are grateful that the program destruction that accompanies significant cuts to public education has been avoided, for the moment. But expenditures have not been frozen, and school districts will incur extraordinary costs in the coming year, to help students recover lost ground in learning from the disruptions they are now experiencing.

Sadly, the students and families we serve are currently experiencing unprecedented emotional distress associated with this health crisis. Very often the school is the most immediate, and the most easily accessible, line of support for the most vulnerable. It will be absolutely critical for us to have funding for the mental health services that will be necessary for students and families once regular classes resume.

Also important is the fact that the current freeze in state funding falls hardest upon school districts in Western New York, which lag well behind the rest of the state in overall school funding and possess the least capacity to raise local funding through property taxes. Furthering our budgetary concerns is the fact that our overall state budget will only be balanced with a federal infusion of aid to our state in the amount of \$10 billion to \$15 billion to fill the fiscal hole caused by our efforts to combat this national health crisis. Absent this amount, the State Budget Director will almost certainly have to make massive mid-fiscal year cuts to school aid, likely beginning at or about May 1.

Cuts to Public School Aid, of the magnitude required absent substantial federal relief, threaten to leave Western New York’s school districts instructionally insolvent in the short run, if not fiscally insolvent in the long run. We support the bipartisan request of the National Governors Association for \$500 billion in stabilization funding to state governments to offset revenue losses from the public health crisis.

We'd also like to amplify the voices of counties, towns and villages, who are similarly in dire need of federal relief dollars.

In our view, the federal appropriation for the 20-21 federal fiscal year should minimally include \$17 billion for New York State and \$1 billion directly to New York State's public schools to compensate for lost aid from the state. The school aid portion should be targeted directly for public schools to be appropriated via an act of the Legislature and Governor.

We applaud the efforts that are underway at present to enact a significant federal relief package to states and local governments. We know you are aware that New York is the epicenter of this pandemic and our state and local costs of response are significantly above any other state. This fact will lead to ongoing challenges for school funding not just this year, but for several years into the future.

We greatly appreciate your support of our New York State, and of its public schools during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Cornell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael R. Cornell
Superintendent of Schools