



## “AQE In Action”

*December 2009*



In communities across New York State, the Alliance for Quality Education is winning local victories to improve our schools, advancing a statewide agenda centered around accountability and fair funding, and building a strong movement for educational justice.

As this newsletter shows, the past few months have been busy and fruitful, most notably for our victory in preventing a \$686 million mid-year state cut to education. We encourage you to forward this newsletter to your friends, co-workers, neighbors, and family.

During this time of giving, please consider making a donation to fight for quality education. Your contribution will support the greatest gift of all – a better future for our children. Click [HERE](#) to donate using our secure web site.

## State Budget Victory!

AQE played a leading role in defeating Governor David Paterson's proposed \$686 million in mid-year cuts to education. The Senate and Assembly held public hearings across the state at which parents and community members stood in unison, breaking pencils in half to symbolize the broken promise to our children. We generated hundreds of phone calls to legislators and mobilized parents from around the state to travel to Albany for a press event and lobby day, culminating in a demonstration and delivery of a 5-foot pencil to the Governor's office.

In the end, the Senate's strong resistance, under the leadership of Democratic Conference Leader Senator John Sampson, joined by Speaker Sheldon Silver and the Assembly Majority, turned the tide against the Governor's proposal.

On December 2, the legislature approved a deficit reduction plan that contained no mid-year cuts to education. The hard work, passion, and creativity of parents, students and education advocates across the state made a big difference in that outcome. The cumulative impact of our work is even more impressive. *Over the past 13 months, AQE has successfully helped prevent \$2.6 billion in state cuts to education.*



*AQE Executive Director Billy Easton speaking out against proposed budget cuts at a Capitol press event.*

## Welcoming the New Education Commissioner

On October 1, New York State's first new Commissioner of Education in 14 years, Dr. David Steiner, was sworn into office.

On that same day, AQE held five press conferences – in New York City, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo – to welcome Dr. Steiner to his new position. We called on him to engage parents and community members and offer them a real opportunity to provide accountability and input. We urged him to adopt the principles and priorities contained in our “Sound Basic Education Covenant,” endorsed by over 100 organizations and leaders across the state ([click here](#)).

AQE also produced a video featuring parents, students, and advocates discussing their hopes and expectations of Commissioner Steiner. Please click on the picture to view the video and circulate the link!



## Long Island: Meeting Commissioner Steiner

AQE held a successful meeting with the state's new Commissioner of Education, Dr. David Steiner.

The meeting was held on November 8 in Wyandanch, one of the poorest school districts in the state and a community where AQE has focused much of its organizing efforts on Long Island.

Four AQE parent leaders – Florence Capers, Rita Moore, Barbara Blue, and Marva Worrell – were invited to participate, along with organizer Danielle Asher. Dr. Steiner applauded AQE for our successes in winning local anti-nepotism and conflict of interest policies. We raised the need for strong leadership in SED and the importance of implementing District Improvement Plans. Dr. Steiner expressed his shared commitment to accountability and communication.



*Commissioner Steiner (in orange tie) with AQE parent leaders, SED officials, and local school officials.*

## New York City: Mobilizing Against Budget Cuts

AQE and our allies created a powerfully dramatic scene at a public hearing concerning Governor Paterson's proposed budget cuts. The hearing was held by the Senate Finance Committee on October 26 at the U.S. Customs House in Manhattan.

In the middle of the hearing, Gail Gadsden stood from her seat to denounce the proposed cuts. As she spoke, over 150 parents and community members rose behind her and, in unison, snapped pencils in half, symbolizing the broken promise to our children, and then began chanting, "Keep the promises! No cuts to schools!"

Following the action, a panel of education advocates organized by AQE delivered testimony opposing the cuts. Combined with strong media outreach, the action helped bolster legislative opposition to the governor's proposal.

*AQE and our allies packed the October 26 budget hearing with over 150 people.*



## Rochester: Speaking Out Against Budget Cuts



*AQE Rochester leaders Darlene Eastland, Sidney Hawkes, Nate MCCray and Jamar Nathan with Senator Joseph Robach.*

Rochester parents hit the road, racking up the miles to speak out against mid-year cuts to schools.

On October 23, students and parents from Rochester joined AQE groups from Syracuse and Binghamton at an Assembly Ways & Means hearing in Syracuse. On cue, over 30 parents rose, broke pencils to symbolize the broken promise to our kids, and chanted “No cuts to education!”

Rochester parents also car-pooled to Albany on November 9 for AQE’s press event and lobby day. We met with Assembly members David Gantt, Susan John, and David Koon, each of whom assured us that they would oppose education cuts. We also met with Senators Joseph Robach and James Alesi, who likewise committed to protecting our schools.

## Syracuse: Action Against Budget Cuts

Facing a \$4.9 million mid-year cut to Syracuse schools, the city’s parents and education advocates sprang into action.

We organized parents to attend the Assembly’s hearing in Syracuse on October 23, testifying against the cuts and breaking pencils to signify the broken promise. In Albany, we met with Senator David Valesky and Assemblywoman Joan Christenen to urge their leadership in opposing the cuts.

At the local level, AQE held a press conference in September. Finally, we mobilized parents and community members to call legislators.



*AQE Syracuse Leaders, Margaret Glenn and Jovan Collins, staff an outreach table at a School Board Candidate event.*

# Buffalo: Local, State, and National Impact



*Parent leader Tina Washington Abu-Baker at the Buffalo hearing*

Buffalo's AQE chapter has had local, state, and national impacts in recent months.

Statewide Steering Committee member, Bryon McIntyre, was brought to tears during his emotional testimony as he spoke out against mid-year education cuts at a hearing in Buffalo on November 2. Buffalo activists also generated nearly 300 calls to legislators in our successful effort to stop the mid-year cuts.

We've been busy on the local level as well. The petition in support of a citywide dress code has reached 2,000 signatures. Our goal is to present 10,000 signatures to the school board this spring. And AQE recently joined the city's Dropout Prevention Summit, where we'll be active on the high school violence subcommittee. To cap it off, Buffalo sent several representatives to Washington, DC for the Schott Foundation's annual national summit.

## Faith Initiative



Three months ago, AQE and the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice launched an exciting new project to strengthen the grassroots movement for educational justice. Our plan is to build relationships with and mobilize the leadership and membership of New York City's numerous faith-based communities and institutions around issues of educational equity and excellence.

Already, we have successfully engaged over 60 congregations and clergy leaders in our efforts. Through our e-alerts and calls to their state legislators, they participated in our successful campaign to prevent mid-year budget education cuts.

In addition, the bishops of the six Episcopal Dioceses in New York State wrote a powerful letter to Governor Paterson opposing education cuts. The letter stated, in part: "The lack of resources will reinforce the school to prison pipeline. The proposed cuts disproportionately affect poor and minority children of color further entrenching institutional racism in our society." Click [HERE](#) to read the letter in full.

For more information, contact Zakiyah Ansari, Organizer: 212-328-9266; [Zakiyah@aqeny.org](mailto:Zakiyah@aqeny.org)



### *Make a donation today*

*All children in New York State deserve a quality education. Help make this right a reality by clicking the envelope to donate.*

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Your gift will support our successful work to win funding to reduce class size, expand pre-kindergarten, and provide essential education services for millions of New York children. Our organizing and advocacy has shown proven results: millions of dollars in funding, while holding education officials accountable for how the money is spent. Your gift will enable us to educate the public, involve parents and community members, and inform our elected officials.

Your donation today will help give every student the opportunity to learn. Donations will be used to fund advocacy as well as media relations to keep education issues in the news and at the forefront of statewide issues. No matter the amount, each donation makes a difference. Please make the choice to make a difference by giving now.



### **Get involved.** Contact your regional office:

Albany **518-465-4600**  
Buffalo **716-855-1522**  
Long Island **516-541-1006**  
New York City **718-222-1089**  
Rochester **585-288-4693**  
Syracuse **315-435-2480**

We welcome your feedback on both the newsletter and our work! Please send comments to Nikki Jones, Communications Coordinator: [njones@aqeny.org](mailto:njones@aqeny.org)