We are in our PTA Advocacy season. It is time for us to make our voices heard on every level.

The Governor Cuomo’s Education Reform Commission released its first set of recommendations including:

- Full-day prekindergarten for all students in school districts with the highest needs. Studies show that student outcomes greatly improve with access to good quality early childhood education;

- Family engagement focused, school-based community services to improve student achievement;

- More access to computers and new and improved use of technology through “innovation zones” in which schools invest in “transformative technology” that can serve to open access to student learning and engage and inform parents;

- Building better bridges from high school to college and careers, in which high schools offer more classes for college credit, and career and technical education programs in every region of the state to give all of our students more options;

- Given that there are many smaller districts in the state and limited resources, increased access to educational opportunity by encouraging school districts to consolidate and to create regional high schools; and

- More time spent in school through a restructured school day and school year to create more learning time for students.

While we applaud many of the initiatives for addressing significant concerns that must be addressed in order to give all students in New York State the sound basic education that they deserve, we are concerned that the most critical issue that impacts all of our districts was not addressed:  **school funding**.

The combination of the property tax levy cap, as well as unfunded and underfunded mandates has forced our public schools to make cuts in academic and social programs that are beneficial to the education of our children.  We may discuss the well-established benefits of early childhood education and promote full day pre-kindergarten programs, but we are doing so at a time when school districts like Port Chester are proposing eliminating their kindergarten program and many other districts are cutting their kindergarten programs from full day to half day due to budgeting concerns.  Competitive funding awards like the ones proposed to cover the costs of longer school days and school years does not guarantee equal access to services for every student.  It is inherently unfair, as it excludes the vast majority of students whose schools do not qualify.

Each and every initiative proposed by the committee would require a significant investment at a time when our school districts, even those in low need communities, are struggling to maintain the quality of academic programming. Therefore, we urge concerned parents to contact the Governor’s Commission on Education Reform at: [http://www.governor.ny.gov/webform/educationCommissionForm](http://www.governor.ny.gov/webform/educationCommissionForm" \t "_blank) and tell them that education reform can not happen without mandate reform, and it can not happen in a tax levy cap state unless the state commits to funding new mandates.  We need education funding reforms before any other meaningful reforms can happen.

Westchester East Putnam Region PTA

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*cada*nino.*una*voz.**