
CFE REPORTS

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The Newsletter of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.

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HIGH COURT EXPEDITES CFE APPEAL SETS FIRM DATE FOR ARGUMENT

Responding promptly to a request from CFE, the Court of Appeals has agreed to expedite the hearing of the appeal in *CFE v. State of New York*. New York's highest court has now established a definitive schedule for briefing and oral arguments that will likely result in a final decision in this decade-long case by the end of the court's current session in late June or early July 2003. The briefing schedule allows CFE to submit its appeal brief by January 31 and gives the state until April 9 to submit its brief. CFE's reply brief will be due on April 21.

The court has set May 8 as a firm date for the oral arguments in the case, and it will allow each party 60 minutes to present their arguments double the normal maximum in such hearings. Oral arguments will take place at the Court of Appeals courthouse in Albany.

CFE headed back to court after settlement talks it had been pursuing with legal representatives

of Governor George Pataki reached an impasse at the beginning of December. During last year's election campaign, Governor Pataki announced his interest in settling the case after coming under criticism as a result of the June 2002 Appellate Division ruling that an eighth-grade-level education was all that the state owed schoolchildren.

Michael A. Rebell, CFE's executive director and counsel, said at that time: "We regret that the settlement talks have failed to produce definitive results for New York State's schoolchildren. We can no longer delay proceeding with our appeal and seeking from New York State's highest court a prompt ruling that will ensure that all children receive what our state constitution guarantees them the right to a sound basic education. We have, however, made some progress in these talks in exploring ways to reform the current state education finance system, and we hope that we can continue to work with the Governor and the Legislature, even while the litigation proceeds, to start laying the foundation for a new funding structure."

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**For information about events planned in Albany
around the May 8th court date, check the CFE
website, www.cfequity.org, or call
Jessica Garcia at CFE.**

CFE LAUNCHES NEW YORK ADEQUACY STUDY

In Albany on December 4, CFE and the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) came together with education advocates and business and civic leaders from across the state to launch "Costing Out: A New York Adequacy Study." Some 28 groups have now joined the statewide coalition that will conduct this independent, cutting-edge study to determine the actual amount of funding needed to provide an adequate education to all students throughout New York State. The study will begin in January 2003 and take a year to complete.

What Is Costing Out?

The costing-out process represents the first step in the development a new education finance

system that will ensure that there are sufficient funds in every New York school district to guarantee all students the opportunity for a sound basic education. A costing-out study determines the actual amount of money needed to provide every child a reasonable opportunity to meet state education standards by, first, identifying the specific resources and conditions necessary and, then, systematically calculating the amounts needed to fund each of these prerequisites. In recent years, many states have undertaken costing-out studies including Alaska, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, Oregon, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire, and Wyoming-- in some cases as part of the development of a new funding system ordered by a state court.

How Is Costing Out Done?

The states that have already performed cost-based funding studies have used one of two basic methodologies, either the "successful schools" or the "professional judgment" approach. The successful schools approach identifies districts that have achieved a specified level of student

BECOME A SPONSOR OF THE NEW YORK ADEQUACY STUDY

The organizations below have already joined the Council on Costing Out (CCO) to advise the expert panel determining the cost of providing a sound basic education to all students in New York. The CCO will also organize public engagement forums throughout the state to gather input from parents, teachers, business leaders, taxpayers, and other citizens in the costing-out process. CCO members need not agree with the final report of the expert panel or with any positions that have been or will be taken by CFE or NYSSBA.

Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.

Alliance for Quality Education

ASPIRA of New York, Inc.

Business Council of New York State

Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.

Citizen Action of New York

Education Fund for Greater Buffalo

Fiscal Policy Institute

Healthy Schools Network

Hispanic Federation of New York

NYU Institute for Education & Social Policy

League of Women Voters of New York State

Midstate School Finance Consortium

National Center for Schools and Communities

National Education Association of New York

New Visions for Public Schools

New York Immigration Coalition

NYS Association of School Business Officials

NYS Association of Small City School Districts

New York State Council of School Superintendents

New York State School Boards Association

New York State United Teachers

PENCIL

R.E.F.I.T.

Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc.

Rural Schools Program

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Teachers Network

United Parents Associations of New York City, Inc.

If your group would like to join the CCO, please contact Jessica Garcia at CFE.

performance, such as meeting state standards. Their average level of expenditures is then used to estimate the level of expenditure that would be required to achieve similar student performance in other districts across the state. Differences in cost of living and in the numbers of students who are low-income, disabled, or English language learners are usually taken into account in these calculations.

The professional judgment approach accepts that the determination of an adequate cost basis involves many judgments; it seeks to establish a process to review the range of judgments involved and ensure that they are made openly, fairly, and independently. Often this is done by assembling panels of educators to identify the specific instructional components deemed necessary to meet state standards and then having economists determine the price of the components identified.

The New York study makes use of the best of both methods, examining successful schools and utilizing professional panels. Its cutting-edge approach was designed by an independent panel of the nation's top education finance experts brought together by CFE and NYSSBA. The team, headed by Dr. Jay Chambers, president of the American Education Finance Association, combines members of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP) and will include ten other leading economists and educators. Several of these experts testified for the plaintiffs in the CFE case and several others testified for the State. The study's logical focus on actual student need represents a non-partisan approach that will help develop a funding system that guarantees adequate levels of funding for all school districts in New York.

EXPLORING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In fall 2002, CFE and the League of Women Voters of New York, with help from Public Agenda, launched a new public engagement project called, "Today's Students, Tomorrow's Citizens: A Community Conversation on Civic Participation and

Our Public Schools." At forums around the state, students, parents, educators, elected officials, and community members gathered to share insights on the critical role of schools in preparing students to be capable voters, effective jurors, and to participate in other productive ways in the civic life of their communities.

Forums were held in Queens, Manhattan, Albany, Rochester, Elmira, and Watertown and were, in most cases, cosponsored by local high schools. After welcomes from local sponsors and an introduction to the topic from CFE, participants listened to a moderated panel discussion among local high school students. The students began the conversation on civic engagement by considering why young people often don't vote or get involved in other civic activities. Students statewide had a range of responses. Many said they didn't see political issues as relevant to their lives; many said that voices went unheard. Some said they felt too uninformed; some said they were too busy. Others felt disillusioned about the political process, with many citing worries resulting from Election 2000.

When asked what issues were important to them, students' answers ranged from school-based concerns about Regents exams and school facilities to local and national concerns about the economy, drugs and drug laws, and racism to global concerns about war and the environment. Students were then asked how they might effect change on some of these issues. Many made concrete suggestions for dealing with school-level problems. Other ideas

Civic Engagement in Action: *Students Inside Albany*

CFE is pleased to support *Students Inside Albany*, an essay contest sponsored by the League of Women Voters of New York State. This year's essay topic:

"Provide three examples of how citizens can participate in government, and steps for increasing the current level of participation in each."

The contest is open to students in grades 10-12. All essays should be 1200 - 1500 words and are due February 28, 2003. Send entries to Jessica Garcia, CFE, 6 East 43rd Street, New York, NY 10017. Or fax: 212-867-8460. For contest rules, see www.lwvny.org.

included organizing parents, friends, and fellow students around larger issues, doing research, going to meetings, and signing petitions.

After the student panel discussion, the audience broke out into small groups to discuss the panel and to delve more deeply into questions about civic engagement (except in Watertown where there was one discussion). The breakout groups, facilitated by a moderators, echoed many of the views of the student panels. Many students said they felt disengaged from the political process, lacked necessary knowledge and skills, and were unsure about how to get involved. Some adults were surprised by this, but others admitted to the same feelings.

What Is Civic Engagement?

When asked to define civic engagement, most groups came up with similar ideas. Voting and serving on a jury were offered in almost every group. Most groups also included community service, keeping informed on the issues, working on political campaigns, organizing others for change, writing letters to policy makers, and attending rallies or protests.

What Knowledge, Skills, and Values Do Students Need for Civic Engagement?

Participants came up with long lists of what students need to be effective citizens. Most forums identified the need for knowledge of U.S. history and government, current events, economics, science, and math. Needed skills cited included high-school level reading and writing, critical and analytic thinking, and research skills. Needed values cited included empathy, responsibility,

persistence, self-confidence, and respect for others.

How Are Schools Doing in Preparing Students to Be Civically Engaged?

Most groups felt that schools could better prepare students for civic engagement if they were adequately funded. Many schools lack enough qualified teachers, needed programs, and up-to-date materials and facilities. In many forums, teachers and students also cited preparation for Regents exams as an obstacle to teaching and learning some of the knowledge, skills, and values needed for civic engagement: the required curriculum left little time for current events, community service projects, or a more hands-on approach to engaging students in civic life. Students’ need for a sense of empowerment and confidence also came across.

Next Steps

At the forums’ end, participants shared ideas for how their community would like to follow up on the conversation. Proposed next steps included telling others—including politicians and parents—about forum issues; fostering greater collaboration among parents, communities, and schools; adding a unit on local politics and governance in Participation in Government classes; designating a student liaison to attend school board meetings and make sure that student voices were heard; and inviting locally elected officials into the school on a regular basis to give students an opportunity to express their concerns, as well as to be kept informed on local issues.

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