

# State should reject property tax cap

Cuomo-led initiative unfortunately has widened the gap in education funding

BY ANDY PALLOTTA

When I listen to politicians in Albany debate property taxes, I am reminded of a famous quote from T.S. Eliot, who said, “Most of the evil in this world is done by people with good intentions.” The rush to make New York’s flawed and undemocratic property tax cap permanent is an example of something that started with the best of intentions, but has led to cruel outcomes.

I understand the goal. I am a taxpayer. I also am president of a union that represents workers in every community of this state. I spend much of my time on the road, listening to the concerns of our members and the people we serve. Nobody wants to pay one dime more in taxes than is absolutely necessary.

At the same time, as an educator and union leader I believe we have to be realistic about what it takes to help students succeed and communities thrive. It all starts with strong teachers working in safe and supportive conditions. That is why I have fought

for decades for great public schools that can serve the diverse needs of our students.

Long Island communities — like many across New York — face tough choices, none more challenging than how to balance the need to invest in our futures without overtaxing people today. This is why we need to take a hard look at real facts about the state’s property tax cap before we rush to make it permanent.

The truth is this: Despite its good intentions, the tax cap has not reduced the tax burden facing many communities. According to the Tax Foundation, in 2014 New York State ranked second in the country in state and local taxes per capita. Today, after years of the tax cap, we’re No. 1 — and not in a good way.

What the tax cap has done is widen the gap in education funding between wealthy and poor school districts. It has denied our state’s poorest school children the educational opportunities provided to those in wealthier districts.

We should not repeat California’s mistake. Instead, New York



Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, speaking at the Long Island Association in Woodbury Feb. 8, wants the property tax cap to be made permanent.

HOWARD SCHNAPP

should replace the temporary cap with something that will actually work. New York needs a real progressive tax structure that bases local tax bills on a person’s ability to pay, not a person’s property value. Such a system caps a person’s property tax burden at a certain percentage of his or her income. They would receive tax relief for the portion of their bill above that income-based limit. This would mean major savings for low-income households, middle-class fami-

lies, and homeowners on fixed incomes, such as retirees. It would prevent people from being taxed out of the communities they love, while also funding the schools and public services that made them fall in love with that community in the first place.

New York has taken steps toward properly funding our education. The governor has proposed nearly \$1 billion in increased aid for the coming year. Unfortunately, that falls well short of the \$2.2 billion in-

crease public education advocates say is needed just to keep pace with current needs. A property tax cap only exacerbates that shortfall.

Some communities have recognized that and voted at the ballot box to override the tax cap. But the 60 percent threshold required to exceed the cap is an undemocratic obstruction for others who otherwise have majority support for an override.

Unfortunately, the illusion of a quick fix is easier than the hard work of real reform. The State Senate has passed a bill making the tax cap permanent. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo included it in his budget proposal.

Fortunately, there is time to get this right. When the governor and legislative leaders sit down at the end of this month to iron out the details of the state budget, hopefully they’ll craft real reform that provides real relief to the people who need it.



Andy Pallotta is the president of New York State United Teachers, a statewide union with members in

education, human services and health care.



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## Child care a challenge for local communities

As an educator and the parent of a toddler, I couldn’t agree more with the finding that Long Island lags in the availability of quality child care and early education [“Forum: LI a laggard in early ed,” News, Feb. 15].

However, there is day care

on Long Island that gets it right: The Children’s Greenhouse at Nassau Community College. For almost 40 years, the Greenhouse has provided high-quality, lost-cost day care (ages 2 months to prekindergarten) that primarily serves young student parents of the college, as well as faculty. Tuition is on a sliding scale. Faculty subsidize student rates,

and students can use some of their financial aid.

Although national data reveal disappointing graduation rates for community college students, NCC student parents have a high rate of academic success, in part because of the services from the Greenhouse. More than half of Greenhouse student parents have a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher. Graduates’ professional achievement enables them to contribute to our local economy. The Greenhouse is an exemplar in early child care for other institutions.

Gina Siple, Glen Head

**Editor’s note:** The writer is on the board of the Greenhouse and is an NCC faculty member.

Please make child care affordable again. The cost to send a child or children to day care is ridiculous. Who can afford to work, feed and clothe a child and then pay an outrageous

amount for child care? Families are struggling to keep up.

Kerri McCall, Amityville

Universal public school prekindergarten has devastated nursery schools and day care services in my community since it was implemented several years ago. Most have gone out of business. They cannot compete with “free” public school programs no matter how outstanding the school is. Of course, taxpayers are paying for it. With universal pre-K, the government has added another grade to the school system. Higher taxes drive away young middle-class families.

Private schools have been thrown to the wayside. We created jobs for ourselves and hundreds of others over the decades, provided an excellent community service and gave parents choices. We never asked for government funds, operating solely on tuition paid

by families.

Instead of universal pre-K, the government would have spent less by expanding existing programs only for needy residents.

If parents at my private nursery school can afford the tuition when a child is 3 years old, they can afford it the next year when the child is 4. But they can’t resist the “free” public school.

Cheryl Spaccarotella, Patchogue

**Editor’s note:** The writer is the owner-director of Kiddie Kollege Nursery School in Patchogue.

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