

**Want more information?**

**Have an idea, suggestion or concern?**

**Give Pete a call, or drop him a line at any of the following!**

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Dear Friends:

Education is the most important sector overseen by our state government, followed closely by public safety and security. An education gives one the keys to the future, the tools to succeed and opens countless doors.



Quality, affordable education is a simple but powerful concept, yet one that continues to elude New Yorkers, especially those in our small and rural communities across the state. As I travel the 127th Assembly District, it's been my privilege to work with 26 school districts and five BOCES districts – all of them committed to helping their students grow.

While the pressure of the recession has triggered the call for widespread reform over the last two legislative sessions, much of this attention has focused on other issue areas, leaving our schools to largely fend for themselves.

This same recession has shifted the focus on the expense side of the equation. Fiscal scarcity and heightened competition for limited resources have drawn increasing public sensitivity to how and where tax dollars are spent in our schools, particularly where property taxes are concerned.

Inside, you can learn more about the specific education reforms taking place in our state as well as my efforts to ensure every New Yorker has a high-quality, affordable education.

Sincerely,

Assemblyman Pete Lopez

A Special Report on Education from

ASSEMBLYMAN

**Pete  
Lopez**





# Pete Lopez: Fighting for Quality Affordable Education

## Update on Education Reforms

### Regents Reform

The Regents Reform Agenda focuses on increasing the quality of education in New York State. As part of this effort, they are placing a strong emphasis on college and career readiness, and will implement new standards for teaching and learning. The agenda will also help teachers and administrators more efficiently gauge a student's progress and improve teacher and leader effectiveness in our state's schools.

For more information on the Regents Reform Agenda please visit: <http://engageny.org/>

For more information on the Common Core Standards Timeline please visit: <http://engageny.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ccsstimeline.pdf>

### Governor's Mandate Relief Task Force

School districts across the state continue to feel the strain of unfunded and costly mandates. In December, Governor Cuomo's Mandate Redesign Team issued its final report. The report includes information on successes such as providing mandate relief to schools and local governments, efforts that were included in the Omnibus Mandate Relief Act of 2011. Included in these efforts was providing flexibility in claims auditing, reducing the frequency of the Pre-K children census and allowing schools and BOCES to work together to provide regional transportation services.

To view the Final Report please visit: [http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/Final\\_Mandate\\_Relief\\_Report.pdf](http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/Final_Mandate_Relief_Report.pdf)

To learn more about the Mandate Relief Council please visit: <http://www.governor.ny.gov/mandatereliefcouncil>

### Governor & Legislative Ad Hoc Reforms

- 1) Property Tax Cap:** New Yorkers pay some of the highest property taxes in the entire country. The tax cap was intended to offer a solution to this problem, but it will not be truly effective until mandate relief can help with the financial burden schools face. Unfunded and underfunded mandates are significant cost drivers and without addressing those directly, our schools will be hard pressed to untangle themselves from the current financial crisis.
- 2) Race to the Top compliance:** Last year, approximately \$700 million in Race to the Top funding was nearly lost because New York failed to fully implement a comprehensive teacher evaluation system. Although legislation was passed to create this system, legal issues with the implementation of the law held up its progress. To address these issues and to ensure New York would receive the funding, a revamped evaluation system was passed this year. Teachers and principals will be assessed on teacher performance and student achievement on state and locally selected assessments.  
[To learn more about the evaluation system please visit: http://engageny.org/effective-practice/](http://engageny.org/effective-practice/)
- 3) Tier VI Pension Reform:** The Tier VI proposal by Governor Cuomo sets the stage for long-term savings for school districts. School districts, according to a recent NYSSBA (New York State School Board Association) report, will pay \$103 million more in pension costs and healthcare benefits than the maximum tax levy increase allowable under the property tax cap in 2012-13.

### PETE'S FOCUS ON EDUCATION:

Pete believes we can find ways to manage the cost of education while ensuring continued quality. As a supporter of grassroots decision making, Pete has been calling on the community to help find real solutions that relieve the financial burden our schools face without compromising them.

**2009: Pete held meetings with local residents on education affordability, the impact of mandates on our community, and the effectiveness of our education system in today's global economy. Highlighted issues included reforming the funding formula to better provide for rural and high-needs schools, improving Internet access, and reducing the burdensome mandates that drive up property taxes and prevent funds from being used in the classroom.**

**2010: Pete formed citizen-based regional education reform committees comprised of parents, taxpayers, employers and educators with the aim of gathering ideas and building consensus. His goal was to share the findings with the Governor, State Legislature and statewide organizations.**

**2011: The enactment of the property tax cap, coupled with increased costs, left many small and rural schools barely keeping their heads above water, forcing cutbacks in programs and services.**

**Governor Cuomo established the new NY Education Reform Commission by Executive Order on April 30, 2012. Comprised of a different makeup than Pete's committees, the commission aims to find ways to improve teacher recruitment and performance, reform education funding, increase parent participation, make better use of technology in the classroom, and ensure our education system meets the needs of students while protecting taxpayers. The Commission is gathering input and information from across the state and will submit preliminary recommendations to the Governor by December 1, 2012.**

While the Governor's commission is timely, we still face the collective challenge of providing a balance of interests as well as ensuring our rural communities have a voice. Pete is reaching out to the Governor to ask that he bring broader representation to this important initiative and plans to personally attend as many of the commission meetings as possible. Pete believes that now is the time to help our rural schools, and looks forward to working with you as we shape our children's future.