

## **Representative Novak,**

Please support the school-based portion of the governor's budget. Ithaca used all of ESSER 1 and GEERS on Technology and substitute teachers. We had to hire full-time substitutes, at a higher than normal rate so that there would be adults in the building to watch students in case a class had to go virtual. That was not planned in my original budget. Also, since we were in class almost all the time, we had to hire additional paraprofessionals to watch lunch and recess. Ithaca chose to cohort 4k-5th grade all year and Middle school until semester, a practice our county health nurse recommended. The amount of money spent already is not in our normal budget. Concerning ESSER II and III, we plan to use the money as directed, to increase learning for students. We want to have an after-school program for all our students, and hire a full-time nurse. Ithaca has never had a nurse for more than 8 hours a month! This would give us someone to take care of things typically left undone. We used all of our budget and more since we have not yet totaled the extra hours of cleaning, staff time, cleaning products, and PPE.

As a Director of Pupil Services, I strongly support the Governor's proposal to increase the level of special education aid to reimburse 50 percent of aidable costs by the end of the 2021-23 biennium. First and foremost, this proposal will help us meet the ongoing needs of our most vulnerable students. And, you may not know we have a foster home in my district that uses many teacher hours daily to teach and keep them learning. We also have a need to hire another special education teacher, and not because of Covid, but because of the high needs for my district. Ithaca typically uses a large amount of money to transfer from fund 10 (general education) to fund 27 (special education). If the state would fulfill its obligation to fully fund (or even the requested 50%) and partially fund special education it would help my district and students.

Covid hit Ithaca hard, and we lost student enrollment, but only because of the pandemic. We have many families that chose to homeschool children to keep them safe. Please do not penalize us for that. It was not something that Ithaca did, it was beyond our control. We did have many families chose to be virtual, and by the end of this school year, we have had almost everyone return full-time in person. Please consider the hold harmless adjustment as one to keep.

My district was awarded a mental health grant 2 years ago, but it only skimmed the surface. As we implemented our screening and baseline data, we discovered a HUGE need for more. We were successful in our work, but there is a need for even more. And, while we did apply for the next round of grant funding, even if we were awarded the grant we would still use more money toward our students' mental health and SEL.

If you would also support the increase in the high-cost transportation aid, that would benefit Ithaca too. If the proposal had been in effect in the 2019-20 school year, the Ithaca School District would have received an additional \$67,981 in high-cost transportation aid. That is 2/3 of a bus! And, if you know any bus drivers, send them my way!

I know as a Representative, you have much influence in the budget process. Please think about Ithaca when you make decisions because your actions directly impact my students. I appreciate that you have taken the time to read this email. Thank you for your service on behalf of the children in the Ithaca School District.

**Julie R. Prouty**

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Ithaca School District Superintendent and  
Pupil Services Director