

A D V O C A C Y T O O L K I T

# CAZENOVIA

C E N T R A L S C H O O L D I S T R I C T



*Your voice can make a difference...*

**Be an advocate  
for students in the  
Cazenovia Central  
School District**



WWW.CAZ.CNYRIC.ORG



## *Your voice can make a difference...* **Be an advocate for students in the Cazenovia Central School District**

Cazenovia Central School District—like school districts throughout New York—is facing a fiscal crisis. The downturn of the national economy, coupled with new mandates and the state’s tax levy limit, has challenged public schools to continue to provide a high-quality education to all students with significantly fewer resources. As a result, districts are making devastating cuts to educational programs as they adjust to rising costs that are outpacing revenue.

District leaders at Cazenovia have been working with staff and community members to find creative ways to weather the economic storm without sacrificing the integrity of our program. Yet without meaningful and timely relief from our government leaders, CCSD residents may risk losing the high level of public education that they have come to know and value throughout the years.

The time for change is now. The voices of school leaders and lobbyists for state-level education groups simply are not enough, as recent legislative sessions have shown. Elected officials need to hear from you, their constituents. They need to hear from the people that are most directly impacted by their decisions (or indecisions) year after year—the students, parents, employees, residents, community groups and business owners of Cazenovia.

### **But what can I do?**

Advocacy takes many forms. It could be a note to an elected official, a comment made during a public forum, a letter to a newspaper editor or formal testimony at public hearings. It could be as simple as chatting with neighbors to clear up misunderstandings about education issues or sharing education-related stories with a local civic organization during monthly meetings.

Becoming an advocate for education is not as hard as you might think. Anyone can become involved, at any level they choose. The only prerequisite is a desire to fight for our students and our community schools.

Effective advocates do their homework. They know the issues and plan their communication. Most of all, they give their time to advance their cause. Enclosed in this packet you will find several tools to help you become an advocate for education and for CCSD. Thank you for taking the time to advocate on behalf of the children of Cazenovia and for helping to ensure that they receive the high-quality education they deserve.

### **ADVOCACY CHECKLIST**

Concerned citizens at community forums and public meetings often wonder what they can do to help Cazenovia students. The answer: Complete one or more of the items on the Advocacy Checklist below. Then encourage your friends and neighbors to do the same!

#### ***Empower yourself***

- Choose an issue affecting Cazenovia Central Schools and learn about that issue. Attend a school board meeting, read local and statewide education publications, or review the information posted to the 2013-14 Budget section of the district website ([www.caz.cnyric.org](http://www.caz.cnyric.org)) to get started.
- Develop and hone a “laser talk”—a short, focused message—about the issue you chose. A “laser talk” should briefly identify a problem, present a solution, and issue a call to action. It is a very useful tool when you have only a minute or two of someone’s attention and you want to get a point across.

#### ***Advocate with your elected representatives***

- Send a letter or e-mail to local legislators.
- Call local legislators and schedule face-to-face meetings.
- Establish a relationship with the aides in legislators’ local offices.
- Attend and ask questions at town hall meetings hosted by local legislators.
- Invite a local legislator to be your guest at an CCSD special event.

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- Ask local legislators to agree to take a leadership role on your selected issue.

### Advocate through the media

- Write a letter to a newspaper editor and send your published letter to local legislators.
- Copy editorials or newspaper articles about your selected issue and send them to local legislators.

### Advocate in the community

- Host a discussion about your selected issue at a local business in your community.
- Organize a letter-writing campaign.
- Team up with a school leader to speak to a local community group.
- Participate in a community forum about your selected issue.
- Use social media to spread the word about what you are advocating for:
  - Update your Facebook or Twitter status with a key point from your "laser talk."
  - Share links to relevant news articles or information from the school district website, [www.caz.cnyric.org](http://www.caz.cnyric.org).
  - Invite people to participate in events in your community or online (virtual meetings) that are organized by you, the school district or another advocate.
  - Follow legislators' social media accounts and feel free to reach out to them using these communication tools.

## Key New York State legislators to contact for education/Cazenovia CSD issues (as of 1/13)

### • Senator David Valesky

53rd Senate District  
 Legislative Office Building  
 Room 311  
 Albany, NY 12247  
 (518)-455-2838  
[valesky@senate.state.ny.us](mailto:valesky@senate.state.ny.us)

: [www.facebook.com/SenValesky](http://www.facebook.com/SenValesky)

: @SenDaveValesky

### • Senator John A. DeFrancisco

50th Senate District  
 Legislative Office Building  
 Room 416  
 Albany, NY 12247  
 (518) 455-3511  
[jdefranc@nysenate.gov](mailto:jdefranc@nysenate.gov)

: [www.facebook.com/pages/Senator-John-A-DeFrancisco/](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Senator-John-A-DeFrancisco/)

8776617150

: @JohnDeFrancisco

### • Chair of the NYS Senate Education Committee: Senator John J. Flanagan

Legislative Office Building  
 Room 805  
 Albany, NY 12247  
 (518) 455-2071  
[flanagan@senate.state.ny.us](mailto:flanagan@senate.state.ny.us)

### • NYS Senate Majority Leader Senator Dean G. Skelos

Legislative Office Building  
 Room 909  
 Albany, NY 12247  
 (518) 455-3171  
[skelos@nysenate.gov](mailto:skelos@nysenate.gov)

: [www.facebook.com/senatordeanskelos](http://www.facebook.com/senatordeanskelos)

: @SenatorSkelos

### • NYS Assemblyman William Magee

121th Assembly District  
 Legislative Office Building  
 Room 828  
 Albany, NY 12248  
 518-455-4807  
[MageeW@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:MageeW@assembly.state.ny.us)

### • NYS Assemblyman Al Stirpe

127th Assembly District  
 Legislative Office Building  
 Room 656  
 Albany, NY 12248  
 (518) 455-4505  
[StirpeA@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:StirpeA@assembly.state.ny.us)

### • Chair of the NYS Assembly Education Committee: Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan

Legislative Office Building  
 Room 836  
 Albany, NY 12248  
 (518) 455-4851  
[nolanc@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:nolanc@assembly.state.ny.us)

### • NYS Assembly Speaker Assemblyman Sheldon Silver

Legislative Office Building,  
 Room 932  
 Albany, NY 12248  
 (518) 455-3791  
[speaker@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:speaker@assembly.state.ny.us)

### • Governor Andrew M. Cuomo NYS State Capitol Building

Albany, NY 12224  
 (518) 474-8390  
 Visit [www.governor.ny.gov](http://www.governor.ny.gov) and click "Contact"

: [www.facebook.com/GovernorAndrewCuomo](http://www.facebook.com/GovernorAndrewCuomo)

: @NYGovCuomo



## What does effective advocacy look like?

Personal contact with legislators helps build relationships and establish lines of communication that ensure that the district's story is being heard. Whether you choose to contact your representatives by phone, e-mail or in-person, please keep in mind the following tips to help you convey your message in the most effective way possible:

- **Be brief.** Stick to your key points and be mindful that legislators are often very busy and face a variety of special interest groups that compete for their time and attention.
- **Be respectful.** Even if you disagree on a position, be respectful in your dialogue and stick to the facts. When appropriate be passionate, not emotional.
- **Be clear and specific.** Let legislators know exactly what you want them to do (i.e., vote in favor of a bill, pass legislation) in a way that requires a "yes" or "no" response. Ask them how they will vote, follow-up on your conversation, and hold them accountable.
- **Be a reliable source of information.** Research your issue and know the facts so you can provide information to legislators and answer their questions. Do not assume legislators know specifics about the school district or education issues in general. Be prepared to follow-up with answers to any questions you may not know on the spot.
- **Be honest about your concerns.** Paint the real picture of your situation, even if it is scary. Share the ramifications of an action/inaction for your community's schools and children. Use personal or compelling stories coupled with facts and data.
- **Be timely and persistent.** If an issue has a deadline, such as the passage of the state budget, make sure you give legislators enough time to respond to the issue. Frequent, regular reminders about the importance of the issue, particularly from multiple advocates, can increase the likelihood that legislators will pay attention to the cause.

## Tips for effective written correspondence

Some forms of written communication are more effective than others. While e-mails and form letters are fine, personal letters (perhaps even hand-written) convey a stronger message. They demonstrate the importance of your concerns by showing you went out of your way to make them known. Writing a letter and making a follow-up phone call takes a few minutes, but those steps ensure that your legislator knows just how you want to be represented.

### When writing a letter, you should:

- *Keep your letter short; a single page is best.*
- *Be concise and specific, but add personal touches on how your selected issue impacts you and your family.*

### The letter should include the following parts:

- *Introduction*
- *Problem statement*
- *Proposed solution*
- *Conclusion and call to action*

*Be sure to include all of your contact information (e.g., home address, phone number, e-mail address), so your legislator can reply to you.*



## Tips for effective in-person meetings

A face-to-face meeting with your legislator is a great way to personalize an issue, and to make sure that your feedback is heard. It is also a great opportunity to educate your representatives about a particular issue and to answer any questions they may have on the topic. Community members can choose to meet with legislators on an individual basis, or go in as a small group (no more than two to three people).

### Before the meeting

- Make an appointment.
- Prepare for the meeting:
  - *Define your goals.*
  - *Gather the facts and data.*
- Practice your talking points.
- Reconfirm the meeting by phone a few days before the meeting.

- *Give background on your issue.*
- *Tell your story and explain the impact of any action/inaction.*
- *Make your recommendation or request for action.*

- Get a commitment.
- Allow time for questions.
- Respect the legislator’s schedule and end the meeting on time.
- Leave your contact information and any supporting materials.

### During the meeting

- Be on time.
- Introduce yourself.
- Be polite and gracious.
- Stay on topic.
- Tell the legislator why you are there:

### After the meeting

- Send a thank-you note.
- Follow-up on action items.
- Sustain the relationship.

## GENERAL “DO’S AND DON’TS” FOR TALKING WITH LEGISLATORS

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce yourself and identify which cause you are associated with.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelm legislators with excessive facts, figures, or jargon.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank them for their service to the community and for their time to meet with you and/or read your letter.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture your legislator.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that you are a constituent and have every right to express your opinions, ideas, and concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be rude or intimidating.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stick to a few key points (“laser talk”) when communicating with legislators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get into a lengthy conversation that strays from the original topic.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get back to legislators with answers to questions they may have.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overstay your allotted meeting time.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for some sort of action from the legislator, and follow-up to be sure that action was taken.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be afraid to admit when you do not know the answer to a question.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a relationship with the aides in your legislator’s office.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect the legislators to be experts on the issues.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain your relationship with legislators throughout the year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underestimate your influence .</li> </ul>



# CAZENOVIA

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

## ► NYS Gap Elimination Adjustment

### What is it?

The Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) law was first introduced for the 2010-11 fiscal year by then-Governor David Paterson as a way to help close New York's then \$10 billion budget deficit. Under the legislation, a portion of the funding shortfall at the state level is divided among all school districts throughout the state and reflected as a reduction in school district state aid. The GEA is a negative number, money that is deducted from the aid originally due to the district. In 2012-13, Cazenovia Central School District saw an overall loss in funds of \$1.53 million as a result of the GEA. Since the program began three years ago, the total GEA reduction in school aid for Cazenovia amounts to \$4.43 million.

### Why does it matter?

While it may make sense to state leaders to pass along funding shortfalls to the local level, the "trickle-down" effect of these reductions ultimately falls onto the backs of school districts and in turn, local taxpayers. When revenues decline and costs continue to rise, government agencies, including schools, have three options: increase taxes to pay for programs and services at existing levels, reduce or eliminate programs and services, or rethink the delivery of programs and services.

Cazenovia CSD has employed a combination of all three options throughout the past few years—delivering programs and services in new and creative ways, reducing where necessary based on student-driven needs data, and increasing taxes accordingly. Yet there is only so much that the district can do to be creative when year after year we are receiving

less state aid than anticipated. There is only so much we can reduce or eliminate before the academic program begins to

suffer. And there is only so much we can ask of our taxpayers, who are also feeling the pinch of a stagnant economy. As it now stands, Governor Cuomo and the state Legislature are continuing to apply a GEA for 2013-14 school funding. Even more concerning is that according to the NYS Division of the Budget, the state's projected deficit is expected to grow in 2014-15 and 2015-16—leading school districts to wonder whether there is an end in sight to the devastating GEA reductions that have become part of state law.

### What can I do about it?

As revenues decline or are otherwise limited (e.g., GEA reductions) and school costs rise to unsustainable levels, reductions in program and staffing become necessary to balance the equation. Local community members must speak up on behalf of their students now or risk losing the "Cazenovia education" they have come to expect. Without relief, class sizes

will increase and opportunities for students will decrease. Cazenovia—along with countless schools throughout the state—may soon be forced to offer only the minimum mandated level of public education in New York if funding continues to be withheld.

Cazenovia has eliminated more than 10 full-time equivalent positions since the GEA was first enacted in 2010. In addition, throughout the past three years the district has had to reduce funding to programs and services such as athletics, student clubs, enrichment activities, transportation, buildings and grounds, curriculum development and substitute teachers.

### Below are three easy ways you can help:

- Learn about New York's Gap Elimination Adjustment and how it impacts your school district—fiscally and in relation to programs/services.
- Write letters to your legislators asking them to support the elimination of GEA reductions.
- Meet face-to-face with your legislators to explain the impact of GEA reductions on your students, your schools, and your community.