

Assemblyman **TOM ABINANTI**

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2015-16 BUDGET

On April 1, 2015, just a few hours after the beginning of the state's new fiscal year, the Assembly approved the last of ten budget bills - completing the Legislature's passage of a 2015-16 state budget.

The 2015-16 state budget is a \$150 billion spending plan which increases total spending by almost 2%.

Like last year, the results were once again mixed – some good, some bad and some in between.

The Governor inappropriately included policy proposals in the budget bills that he sent to the Legislature. The Legislature argued that these issues should be dealt with separately and succeeded in separating out most of the non-budgetary issues.

Assemblyman Abinanti voted for nine out of the ten budget bills. He did not vote for the one bill that made policy changes to the state education system that he found unacceptable.

ABINANTI APPOINTED NEW LIBRARIES CHAIR

Newly-elected Speaker Carl Heastie appointed Assemblyman Abinanti Chair of the Assembly Committee on Libraries & Education Technology. The committee has jurisdiction over legislation affecting public, academic, school and private libraries.

In February, Assemblyman Carl Heastie (Bronx) was elected as the new Speaker of the Assembly. Assemblyman Abinanti was one of Heastie's early supporters, stating "Carl Heastie knows the demands of the costly high-taxed NYC area and will fight for the middle class."



Assemblyman Abinanti with Speaker Carl Heastie and Majority Leader Joseph Morelle.

Dear Neighbor,

New York State is responsible to provide every child with access to a free, appropriate public education. New York's constitution attempts to insulate education policy from everyday politics by establishing a separate Department of Education directed by an independent Board of Regents.

Again this year, the Executive Budget as proposed would have adversely impacted public education throughout the State. Assembly negotiators worked hard to better public education.

First, the Executive Budget proposed inadequate funding for public schools. Assembly negotiators significantly increased public school funding. I voted for the \$23 billion education funding bill which increased state education funding \$1.6 billion – 6% over last year.

Second, the Governor proposed policy changes – mischaracterized as "reforms" – that would have increased the importance of standardized tests. Assembly negotiators worked hard to eliminate these misguided proposals. The final language was better, but still unacceptable. I did not vote for this bill.

I have been an outspoken critic of New York's high stakes testing and flawed implementation of the Common Core Standards. I will continue to advocate for our children and push back against proposals that threaten our public schools.

Assemblyman Tom Abinanti



2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

EDUCATION

Everyone deserves the opportunity for a good education – the first step to a better future

2015-16 BUDGET

EDUCATION AID

Provided \$23 billion in education aid – \$1.6 billion or 6% increase over last year.

- \$90 million to support grants – a \$19 million increase;
- \$1.3 billion increase in school aid which includes \$428 million in Foundation Aid and \$603 million to reduce the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) by 50%.

TEACHERS

Recruitment. Provided funding for a new full scholarship program for SUNY/CUNY for top students who commit to teach in New York for five years.

Prep Standards. Established the first statewide, uniform admissions standards for teacher preparation programs and enhanced State Ed authority to close inadequate programs.

Continuing Education. Required teachers to complete 100 hours of continuing education and recertify their licenses every five years.

Tenure. Modified tenure to extend probationary period to four years with no automatic right to tenure at any point; and required a teacher to be rated Effective or Highly Effective in three of four years.

Incentives. Provided a bonus of up to \$20,000 to top performing teachers and tied promotions to evaluations.

STUDENT TESTING

Required the Chancellor to recommend to the Governor and Legislature how to decrease the overall amount of state and local testing, improve test quality and reduce test-related stress and anxiety.

STRUGGLING SCHOOLS

Required “failing schools” to adopt a state-approved improvement plan and demonstrate improvement in one year or face receivership. Appropriated \$75 million to help failing schools.

TEACHER EVALUATION CHANGES

After significant changes were made to the teacher evaluation system in the 2015-16 budget, the Assembly passed legislation to extend the deadline for its implementation to provide the Board of Regents sufficient time to carefully



Assemblyman Abinanti discussed education policy with constituents and members of the Westchester-Putnam School Boards Association.



Assemblyman Abinanti met with teachers and advocates during budget negotiations.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

To provide assistance to those struggling with the costs of post-secondary education, the budget included:

- \$5 million for a new New York AIMS Merit Scholarship program,
- \$5 million for the Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness program,
- \$1.4 million to allow students with disabilities greater access to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP),
- \$1.5 million for Social Worker Loan Forgiveness program (\$250,000 increase), and
- \$150,000 for the Farmer Loan Forgiveness Program (\$50,000 increase).

review the evaluation system and consider input from educators. This change would ensure that school districts do not lose state aid while the new system is developed. The bill awaits Senate consideration.

LIBRARIES

Libraries are our modern day community centers – for everyone

2015-16 BUDGET VICTORIES

The budget included two major victories for New York libraries.

First, the budget achieved a major goal for libraries in the downstate region. Starting January 2016, all libraries will be exempt from paying the MTA Commuter Tax applicable to employers in the MTA region. This puts libraries on equal footing with other local, public educational institutions.

Second, the budget increased operating funds \$5 million over last year – a 6% funding increase.

21ST CENTURY LIBRARIES

The Assembly and Senate passed two Abinanti bills to increase public access to electronic books and help libraries obtain funding for broadband services. The bills await the Governor’s action.

- **A.7626** would direct the State Education Department to develop a comprehensive plan for increasing access to and lending of electronic books in New York public libraries to meet the significantly increased demand for digital media.
- **A.8168** would allow libraries to use funds from the Public Library Construction Grant for broadband installation. The program provides \$14 million annually for acquisition, construction, renovation or rehab of public libraries.



Assemblyman Abinanti with Regent Judith Johnson and Assemblymembers Galef and Otis at Westchester Library System’s “Celebrating Westchester Libraries” event in Tarrytown.



Chairman Abinanti after conducting a Libraries Committee meeting in Albany with State Librarian Bernard Margolis, Assemblyman Steve Otis and Committee Analyst Steve McCutcheon.

NEW REGENT



The Hudson Valley Assembly delegation nominated and the Legislature confirmed Judith Johnson, former superintendent of Peekskill and Mount Vernon school districts, as the new regent for our region – the 9th Judicial District. Johnson replaced longtime Regent Harry Phillips who retired after 15 years. The Board of Regents directs the State Education Department and sets New York’s education policy.

LOCAL GRANTS

The New York State Library has awarded construction grants to four public libraries in the 92nd Assembly District. The grants are supported by a \$14 million capital fund appropriation in the 2014-2015 state budget.

- **Warner Public Library**
\$155,589 to replace the roof and drainage system to protect the building and its contents.
- **Dobbs Ferry Public Library**
\$25,591 to retrofit/replace existing light fixtures with energy efficient long-lasting LED fixtures.
- **Hastings-on-Hudson Public Library**
\$19,107 for purchase and installation of a heating/cooling pump system for the renovated and expanded library community room.
- **Greenburgh Public Library**
\$14,661 for installation of a glass partition and door between the adult reading room and the teen section to alleviate noise and increase patron comfort.

Around the Community



Assemblyman Abinanti with 92nd district librarians at the annual Westchester Library Legislative event in Tarrytown.



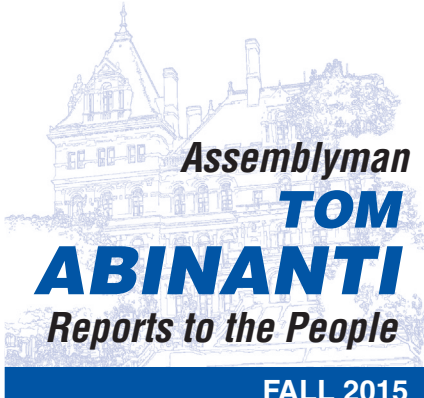
Assemblyman Abinanti spoke at the Ramapo Catskill Library System Legislative Breakfast.



Assemblyman Abinanti at a Rivertowns League of Women Voters event at Irvington Library.



Assemblyman Abinanti joined his colleagues and community leaders to tout the repeal of the MTA payroll tax on libraries at the New Rochelle Public Library.



FALL 2015

Dear Neighbor,

I've been privileged to represent you in the Assembly for the last 5 years. I've worked hard with my fellow legislators to advocate for our suburban needs and concerns. I've tried hard to use state government to make our community better.

This is my first report to you since our 2015 legislative session concluded. I highlight education and the need to strengthen our education system and change the state's flawed Common Core implementation. I also highlight my efforts as the new Assembly Libraries Committee Chair to improve our library services. We made some progress in both areas, but have so much more to do. I look forward to our next legislative session which begins in January.

In the meantime, I continue to work here in Westchester for our community. If I may be of any assistance to you, please don't hesitate to contact my office.