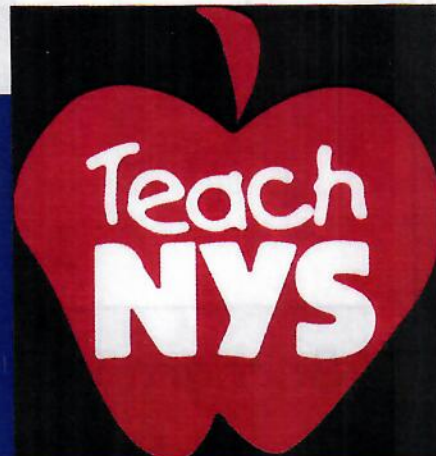
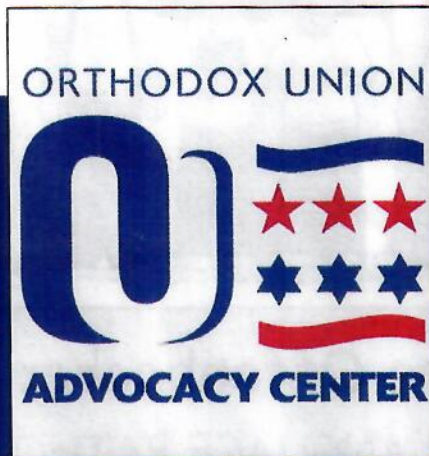
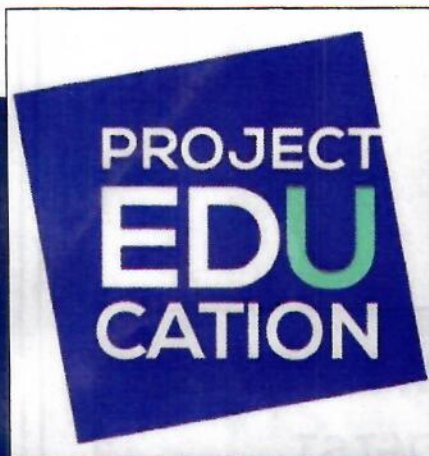


Project Education Joins Forces with OU Advocacy

Albert Laboz



The goal of Project Education is to make Jewish education more accessible to all and to help find a solution to reduce the crippling cost of education.

Project Education has joined forces with Teach NYS, a project of the Orthodox Union—and a stand-alone organization operating to help alleviate some of the costs of yeshivah education and improve the quality of education in our community yeshivot through government funding. Teach NYS is chaired by Sam Sutton and Neil Cohen.

From the outset, education and any supplemental funding for our yeshivot is funded for the most part on the state level, through the state budget, and to a lesser extent, on the city level. Historically, the Jewish community has not spent the necessary resources that other major business interests expend to create influence in NY politics. Jewish education in NY is nearly a three billion dollar enterprise, but has historically spent a few hundred thousand dollars to ask the state to invest in our kids. This had to change.

Together, with a small group of educational leaders, I personally met with Governor Cuomo who is supportive of yeshivah education. The fact that Governor Cuomo is a product of parochial schools makes him sympathetic to our goals.

In collaboration with Project Education, Teach NYS hired a number of high-powered lobbyists and political strategists to target the state legislature to provide funding to our yeshivot. The intensive lobbying produced immediate results, in that New York State has allocated \$8 to \$10 million for our community yeshivot in the upcoming school year to be used for security, state mandated education requirements, such as attendance, security funding, and Universal Pre-K.

The ultimate goal, which is reasonably realistic, is to get the state to pay 100% of STEM (science technology and math) education within the next four to five years.

To understand the process, when Teach NYS lobbies the state and city, it is on behalf of all non-public schools, which include yeshivot, Catholic, parochial and private schools. On the city level, the majority of the non-public schools are yeshivot, while on the state level, yeshivot comprise about 40% of all non-public schools.

The Teach NYS efforts helped secure \$15 million over the next two years for security for non-public schools, beginning in the 2016-2017 school year. Aside from security equipment, this new funding can be used to pay for security personnel. We got the state to triple the amount of security funding it was providing.

Non-public schools are eligible for Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP) and Mandated Service Reimbursement (MSR) funding. These programs reimburse schools for taking attendance and for fulfill-

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ing a variety of specific mandates the state requires. However, the state budget had underfunded these entitlements for many years, which the schools noticed and complained about.

Teach NYS was able to secure approval, so the schools are being reimbursed retroactively for these entitlements. The result was that Teach NYS persuaded Governor Cuomo to allocate over \$250 million in back payments to CAP for the many years it was severely underfunded. OU Advocacy estimates that yeshivot and Jewish day schools are receiving some \$90 million as a result of this agreement.

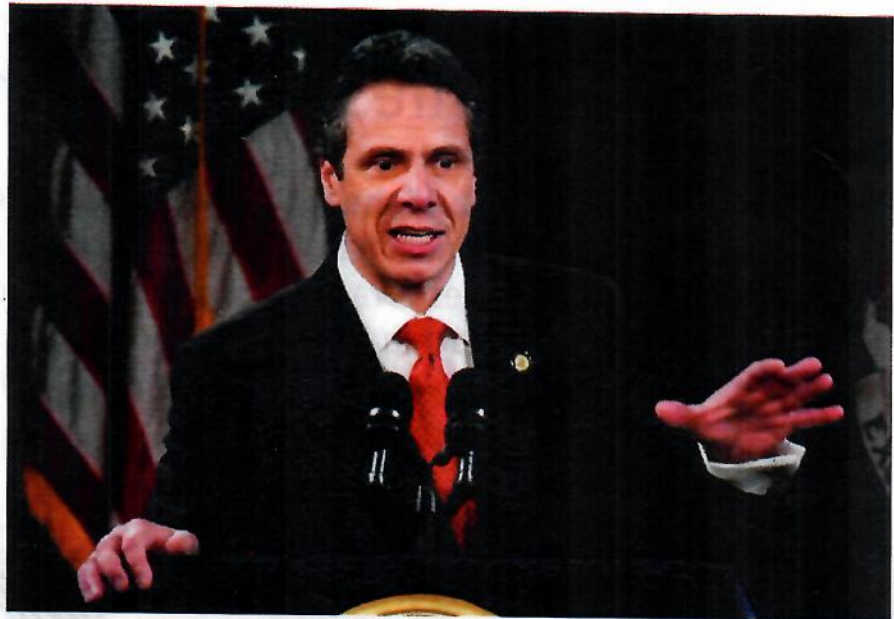
Our third victory is the recognition by the state and city that they have a fundamental obligation to our children's education; they now recognize that there is responsibility for funding not only public school students, but all students.

With nearly 100% of the children in our community attending yeshivot, the issue of its affordability for growing middle class families is causing grave concern and is our community's greatest existential threat.

What would our community be like without our yeshivot? If we don't give our children Jewish educations, who will pray in our synagogues? How can we be sure they will adhere to kashrut? How will our culture be conveyed in the next generation? The yeshivot plant the seeds in our children and guarantee our community's future.

Project Education Works for Our Children

During the past several years, Project Education has had many accomplishments. The board met with community members, conducted online surveys and held focus groups. We found that our community places a high value on Jewish education, that we want our children



Governor Cuomo supports yeshivah education

to be raised in a Jewish environment and to remain in the community after they grow up and marry.

While nearly half of the children in our community are on tuition assistance of some kind, Project Education developed the Tuition Assistance Principles, which sets out expectations and responsibilities of both the schools and parents who receive tuition assistance in a most respectful and dignified manner.

Six of our community schools were signatories to the Principles Document, which is a major accomplishment of Project Education.

Families that apply for tuition assistance need to be treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of family circumstances, yet must adhere to certain guidelines that are fair and reasonable. By agreeing to work within these principles, the schools have universal guidelines, as do the families.

This year, the schools have also agreed to a universal application for tuition assistance, so that when families have children in more than one school, they can use the same application. The application is being used by five yeshivot. Previously, each school had a different application and it made the process very confusing for parents. We also have a fillable pdf on www.projectedu.org.

While there is no single magic solution to alleviating the high cost of tuition, by bringing the yeshivot

together and forming partnerships, Project Education will continue to find solutions that help and eventually will alleviate the high cost of tuition.

Providing a Jewish education to those in need is hesed, an act of loving kindness. The goal of Project Education is to find solutions that will alleviate the tuition burden felt by nearly half the families in the community. Each member of the community has a financial obligation to support the school. Strengthening the educational system ensures that our children will grow up with a firmly entrenched set of Jewish values.

Yeshivot are the glue that holds our community together. They teach our children, impart our Sephardic values and religion, and help our children make friends within the community. Our yeshivot prepare our children to be the future community leaders.

A Jewish education is the single most important thing we can do as a community to keep our children near and dear. It is also an investment—not only in their individual future, but for the future of the community as a whole.

Project Education is working with the schools to make positive change happen, so our community children can have the best and most affordable education possible. □

Albert Laboz is president of Project Education.