



EDUCATION

Are New Yorkers Getting Their Money's Worth in Educational Spending

By **FRANK V. VERNUCCIO, JR.**



Are the vast sums of taxpayer dollars poured into New York's public schools reflected in the quality of education and rates of student achievement being reported?

A study from the Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability raises serious questions about how effectively those funds are used.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Albany spent more per pupil than any other state in the nation during the latest reporting period. At \$18,126, NY spending towers over the national average of \$10,499. The closest state was New Jersey at \$16,271. Over the past decade, there has been a seven billion dollar increase in New York's public school funding. But have New Yorkers received an adequate return on their expensive investment?

The Foundation's study provides a disturbing answer. Four year graduation rates for far too many high school districts are dismal. Although the state average is about 80%, the five largest school districts report statistics that illustrate the crisis. NYC, the largest, claims that 61% receive their diplomas on time. Yonkers has a 63.2% rate, Rochester, 46.1%, Syracuse, 45.9%, and Buffalo, 47.4%. The Lower Hudson Valley districts did better, with Rockland achieving an 82% success rate, followed by Westchester at 80%. Moving further north, Ulster County, despite spending more per pupil than anyplace else in the state (approximately \$20,700) had a 73% four year graduation rate, seven points below the state average.

Even those students who do graduate and proceed to college present challenges. 49.9% of them require remedial coursework.

The reasons New Yorkers do not receive an adequate bang for their educational buck are numerous, but several may well be prominent. Of course, in many areas in the lower part of the state, the cost of living is higher. However, the Foundation believes that one problem is union contracts that prevent reform measures from being implemented, and union resistance to charter schools.

Marcus Winters, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, believes that there is a disconnect between the credentials that teachers receive in their education and the actual needs of the students. This problem is made worse by the practice of placing actual teacher effectiveness in a distant second place to the acquisition of credentials of dubious worth in actual practice when considering promotions, pay, or tenure. The issue is exacerbated by the failure to provide appropriate recognition of educators who truly excel in the classroom.

Another profound issue concerns the actual curriculum. As New York's public schools progressively spend less time on the basics--reading, grammar, mathematics, and American history--in favor of less traditional subjects, the ability of students to develop proficiency in fundamental skills diminishes. Eventually, this leads to disappointing results when adolescents move from the confines of high school to the more competitive realm of college and eventually, the work force.

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ENERGY

Ball Urges Fracking Regulation

By **ABBY LUBY**



There's a camera shot in the beginning of Josh Fox's film "Gasland," about hydraulic fracturing, where he is faces the camera, wearing a full face gas mask and innocently plucking his banjo. Looming in the sparse expansive background are two towering natural gas drills, poised like giant erector sets.

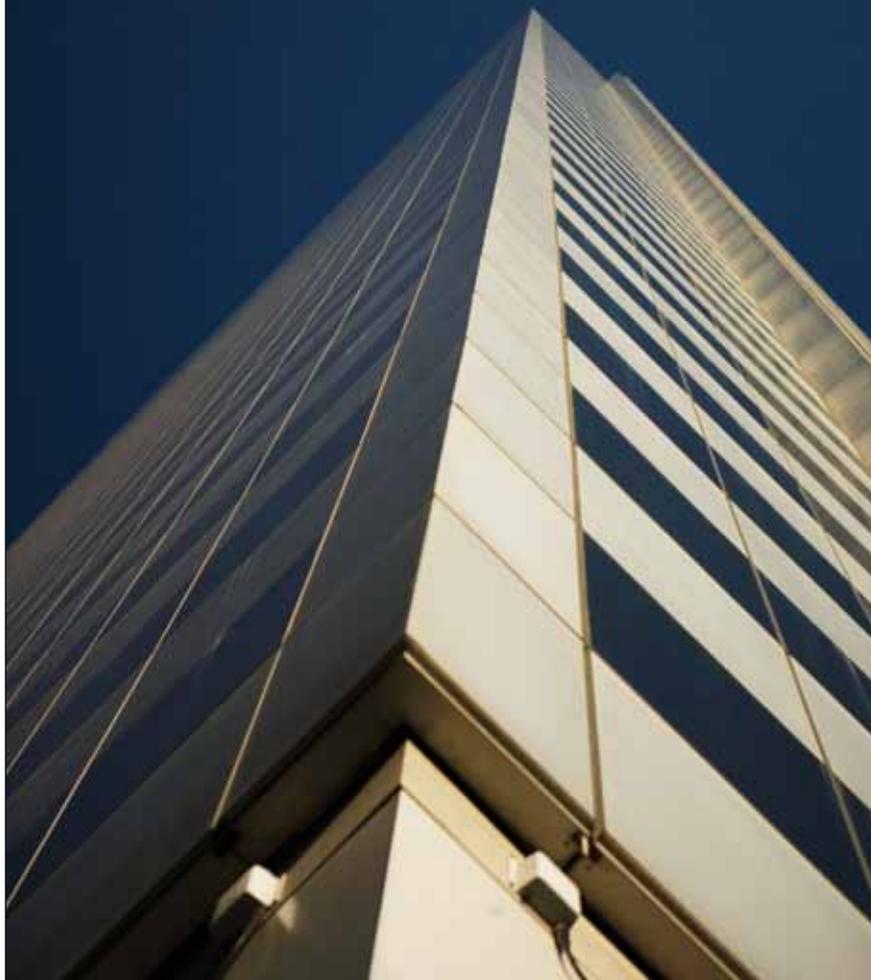
You get the message.

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(L-R): "Gasland" filmmaker Josh Fox next to New York State Senator Greg Ball - Photo by and courtesy of Abby Luby

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ENERGY

Ball Urges Fracking Regulation

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Fox was joined by New York Republican Senator Greg Ball in Peekskill a few weeks ago to not only show the Oscar nominated documentary about the environmental dangers of natural gas drilling, known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, but to warn of the encroaching gas companies crusading to drill in the southern tier of New York State. Fears are mounting that the drilling will poison the New York watershed - our drinking water.

Ball is on the same page as Fox: both see fracking as a public health issue that needs stringent regulation. In the film, Fox shows the dire consequences affecting farmers and property owners across America who allowed unregulated gas companies to drill on their land. Ball toured Pennsylvania with Fox last summer and met with families whose land

was devalued 90 percent and their water was contaminated as a result of fracking. In Peekskill, Ball publicly urged New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to go to Pennsylvania and see the down side fracking.

“This governor has to go to Pennsylvania and see the pain of these farmers and the private property owners. If he saw it he would put a screeching halt on his fracking express, which right now is at a break neck speed.”

Fox, who traveled across the country to shoot his film, saw and unprecedented number of families suffering from severe health problems because of water contamination.

“There are so many unsolvable and mysterious problems,” said Fox before showing the film. “No one knows how to deal with families who have lived in their homes for 30 years, some for five generations, where the land is permanently ruined and there’s no compensation.”

Hard-to-forget scenes from “Gasland” show easily ignited drinking water from the tap and dark, murky water samples from home wells that had become contaminated from fracking chemicals that seeped into the groundwater rendering water dangerous and totally useless. After repeated complaints by some home owners, gas companies acquiesced and supplied



Filmmaker Josh Fox in a scene from his movie “Gasland.”

external water tanks.

Gas companies are eager to drill where there is abundant natural gas from the Marcellus Shale formation, a vast expanse of black shale running deep underground from Ohio and West Virginia northeast into Pennsylvania and southern New York. The shale is close to the surface near the northern Finger Lakes area but runs as deep

cubic feet of natural gas a year.

Here’s how hydraulic fracturing works. As much as one million gallons of water carrying a sand and chemical mix is pumped down a well under high pressure to create fractures in the shale which releases the gas and fills the well. Cuomo has been anxious for gas drilling because it promises to create some 6000 to 24,000 jobs, an estimate made by the DEC. Ball contends that gas companies traditionally don’t hire and train new employees locally but rather export already trained personnel from Wyoming, Texas and Colorado, where fracking is well established.

The outcry against fracking has been growing since the DEC first started reviewing the environmental impacts in 2008, the same year a moratorium was declared on gas drilling. In 2010, a supplemental environmental impact statement was requested by then Governor Paterson and completed in June 2011. In July, 2011 the DEC revised their recommendations for regulations stipulating that no permits should



Filmmaker Josh Fox in a scene from his movie “Gasland.”

as 7,000 feet or more in the Delaware River valley. According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, geologists estimate that the entire Marcellus Shale formation may contain up to 489 trillion

cubic feet of natural gas, which could, when extracted, be sold to New York State customers who use about 1.1 trillion

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It could be something less than 100 wells in the southern tier,” Jaenike said.

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ENERGY

Ball Urges Fracking Regulation

"There have been dramatic improvements in the technology of fracking that have taken place since Mr. Fox shot his movie."

Before the film Jaenike asked Ball if he had read the DEC's updated environment impact statement. Ball uttered something inaudible, turned to his staff person who said she had read some of it. Jaenike and a few others in the audience asked Fox if tapping into local natural gas wouldn't lessen our independence on "foreign and terrorist oil." Fox said he advocated moving away from fossil fuels, preferring the country start to develop sustainable and renewable energy sources.

The DEC claims that their permitting process has always been rigorous and that strongly regulated gas drilling has been in existence since the 1950's. They also claim the drilling has always been done without blasting or explosion, a common practice done in lesser regulated states such as Colorado and Wyoming. The DEC claims New York's strong environmental laws have prevented groundwater contamination from fracking.

Ball has introduced the "Property Owners Bill of Rights," a bill that, if passed into law, would force gas companies to disclose all chemicals used in the hydrofracking process, a cocktail that gas companies usually want to keep secret. The bill would also require companies to compensate New Yorkers for any wrongful death or property damages as a consequence of natural gas extraction.

The public comment period ends on December 12, 2011. There is a web-based comment form at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/75370.html>. A downloadable copy of the DEC report are at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/75370.html>. Hearings will be held throughout the state: Nov. 16: Dansville Middle School Auditorium, 31 Clara Barton St., Dansville, NY, Nov. 17: The Forum Theatre, 236 Washington Street, Binghamton, NY, Nov. 29: Sullivan County Community College, Seelig Theatre, 112 College Rd, Loch Sheldrake, NY and Nov. 30: Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers Street, New York, NY.

Abby Luby is a Westchester based, freelance journalist who writes local news, about environmental issues, art, entertainment and food. Her debut novel, "Nuclear Romance" was published last week. Visit the book's website, <http://nuclearromance.wordpress.com/>

FASHION

New Season – New Reason to Sparkle And Shine



By **BARBARA BARTON SLOANE**

The foliage has been losing its freshness but that's not gonna happen to you! Consider Autumn a second spring, an opportunity to inject new energy into your persona. With the coming holiday season, you'll have an almost daily excuse to get dressed up and spend more time on your makeup using some of this season's prettiest colors.

For this brand's Addict-on-the-go, **Dior's** Holiday Palette Collection features the essentials for creating any beauty look, from fresh and glowing to smoky and bold. The products are housed in a chic tweed case featuring a Dior logo charm and The House of Dior's iconic bow, and containing a lip balm, sculpting powder, eyeliner, eye shadows, lipgloss and - icing on the cake - a mini Dior mascara, all you need to create a festive holiday look. \$77, at Dior beauty counters nationwide

Dolce&Gabbana's makeup inspiration is the essence of the D&G woman: glamorous and sensual, always with a confident and provocative edge. Inspired by the dreamy Mediterranean coast, the makeup is formidably fresh. Its "Touches of Blush" product highlights cheekbones to deliver a healthy flush. Never over the top, always *just right*. \$44, at Saks.com and selected Saks stores nationwide

If *shimmer* is the name of the game this season, then **Shiseido's** Makeup Shimmering Cream Eye Color is the ticket. This shadow glides over eyelids creating a luxurious and deeply pigmented look in an instant. No need to apply powder shadow on top because Shimmering Cream Eye Color delivers strong color definition with maximum performance as well as unprecedented luster and lasting brilliance. \$25, at Shiseido beauty counters nationwide

Starting out as a makeup artist, Bobbi Brown couldn't find shades that looked natural on a wide range of complexions. So in 1991, she teamed up with a chemist and ushered in a new era of natural-looking makeup. Bobbi continues to change the face of makeup with a simple philosophy: "Women want to look and feel like themselves, only prettier and more confident." She accomplishes

this winningly with her Ultimate Party Collection featuring everything a girl-about-town needs to look party-ready. With eight matte, metallic, shimmer and sparkle eye shadows plus four glitter lip glosses, this palette will add a special touch of

holiday fun to any look. It also includes mini lip and mini eye shadow brushes. \$65, at Sephora and Bobbi Brown beauty counters nationwide

Ladies, it's time to get your glow on!

Beauty/Fashion Editor Barbara Barton Sloane keeps us informed on the capricious and engaging fashion and beauty scene. As Travel Editor, Ms



Sloane is constantly globe-hopping to share her unique experiences with our readers; from the exotic to the sublime.