

To the Editor,

1-24-11

Back on January 6th, the headline article in this newspaper suggested the taxpaying citizens of the Guilderland Central School District should meet up to form a consensus on what aspects of the school budget they want to keep and what should be cut. I suggest that instead of a cut, something needs to be added – a key element that has been missing for decades.

Public Education is one of the most fundamental aspects of American life. It has recently been argued that it is a Constitutional right. If that is true, it lacks the one key characteristic of all our other rights, the right to choose. Choice is a natural right, an indispensable key to democracy. It creates competition and lowers costs.

If parents as well as teachers enjoyed more academic freedom, we would not have to try to make all schools offer all things to all people. If you liked the athletic or religious focus of a school in a district other than the one in which you reside, you should have the right to send your child to that school. In fact, I suggest you do have that right although you are currently being denied it.

Did you know that January 23rd marked the beginning of National School Choice Week? Our new Congressional Majority Leader, John Boehner has long been a proponent of school choice. He will make it an issue to be taken up by the new Congress and he will have a lot of support behind him. The most recent and prominent voice being added to the school choice debate is that of Bill Cosby.

What about the teachers? Don't they have a Constitutional right of free association? Why are they compelled to join a union in order to be able to work where they want to? Non-union schools cost less, offer more diversity, innovation and teacher autonomy.

I jumped on the school choice bandwagon about fifteen years ago when it saw a spike in popularity. Californians were offered a school choice ballot initiative back then but the unions spent \$16 million on a negative media blitz to defeat it. They successfully portrayed school choice as a risky scheme. I say forcing people into a union in order to work was the risky scheme that has proven nearly fatal to our economy. Unions still have a lot of money and power but very little credibility.

The problems with education back then were the same as they are today and the non-solutions back then are same non-solutions the unions are promoting today. It is time, actually well past the time to start thinking outside the box. It has to start within the education industry itself, at the local level with teachers, BOE and PTO members who have the courage to stand up to the injustice that is the status quo.

More money is not an option. More freedom is.

David Crawmer, North Greenbush