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Agudah NJ Secures Increased Yeshiva Funding

By Harry Glazer | October 28, 2020

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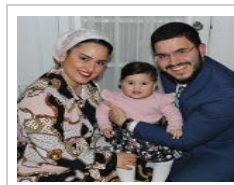


(l-r) David Gross (chairman, Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office), Rabbi Avraham Glustein (head of school, Politz Day School, Cherry Hill), New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, Rabbi Avi Schnall (director, Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office) and Assemblyman Gary Schaer, at a bill signing in Passaic in spring

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2019. (Credit: Photo provided by Rabbi Avi Schnall)

Dogged determination has led to the recent success of the New Jersey office of Agudath Israel of America's efforts—tracking a growing need, mobilizing yeshiva parents, working with a principled and persuasive leader in the New Jersey state legislature—in getting a notable increase in state funding enacted in the New Jersey state budget.

In 1977 the New Jersey State Legislature established a category of allocations to nonpublic schools termed “192 Auxiliary Services,” which would fund remedial instruction in English, language arts and math. Over the decades that followed, 192 Auxiliary Services received limited New Jersey state funding, until the legislature took action in 2010—at the behest of groups like Agudath Israel—to more fully fund this need. That year, based on the assessed number of students needing services in nonpublic schools, the state allocated \$31,650,000 or \$995 per student, per year.



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At the time, this allocation was a great victory and made a major difference in the lives of yeshiva families whose children struggled with learning difficulties. While the allocation per child did not cover all the expenses, it went a long way.

As the years went on, though, the allocation stayed at that fixed rate while the conditions in yeshivot changed. As Rabbi Avi Schnall, director of the Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office, noted: “The allocation had to be adjusted, to meet the growing need and to reflect current costs of those services.” Rabbi Schnall reports that some yeshivas were considering cutting some of their remedial services just to be able to afford the others. He also pointed out that



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192 Auxiliary Services funds support services for children who are being mainstreamed; “they just need a boost” to make it in their schools.

In the 2020-2021 school year, the Agudath Israel of America’s New Jersey office undertook a concerted campaign to advocate for an increase in the New Jersey state allocation for 192 Auxiliary Services. They mobilized hundreds of affected yeshiva parents, who were becoming increasingly hard pressed to pay for these services, to send priority letters to members of the New Jersey legislature. Rabbi Schnall testified before the New Jersey Senate Budget Committee in early spring (before pandemic precautions were put in place). And Agudath Israel redoubled its efforts to work with a key ally, Deputy New Jersey State Assembly Speaker Gary Schaer.

Unexpectedly, the pandemic that broke out and upended many of the ways we conduct our lives also had the effect of highlighting to New Jersey legislators the critical importance of support services in K-12 schools. With schools relying on remote instruction, the plight of students who struggled to “keep up” became more pronounced and more prominent.

When all these factors came together, the net result was remarkable. In the New Jersey state budget signed into law shortly before Sukkot, the legislators included a \$2 million increase in funding for 192 Auxiliary Services—bringing the total allocation to \$33,650,00. This increase effectively added \$50 per child, per year, to children now receiving remedial services.

Rabbi Schnall stated: “In a year where the state grappled with a \$6 billion deficit, the fact that we got an increase in 192 Auxiliary Services funding, it’s amazing. This new allocation also showed the members of the legislature that the existing allocation needed to be adjusted, which positions us well for discussions on next year’s state budget.”

Rabbi Schnall expressed thanks to Assemblyman Schaer for his work to make this increase happen and also to Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, Senate President Stephen Sweeney and New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, who all strongly supported this increase.



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David Gross of Clifton, chairman of the Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office, stated: "I've been working with Rabbi Heshy Hirth of Passaic and Ralph Zucker of Lakewood, who founded and funded the Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office with me, decades ago. I've learned that the road to accomplishing what you seek in politics can take decades. But if you persevere, effectively establish the justice of your claim and that you represent law-abiding good citizens, and build important relationships, you can eventually see success. We are so pleased to have a champion like Assemblyman Gary Schaer, who has the unique talent of mobilizing his colleagues to support important communal needs like this one."

"This crisis has reminded us how interconnected our communities are, and how the struggles of one affect us all," said Assemblyman Schaer. "Rabbi Schnall and Agudath Israel have been an inspiration to me as we have fought to increase the funding for these essential programs. We have ensured that every student is given the resources they need to succeed, regardless of what school they attend."

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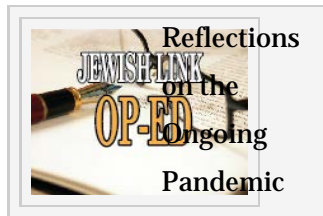
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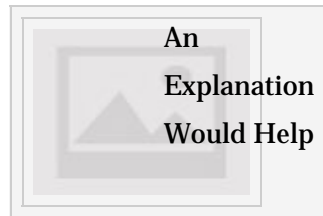
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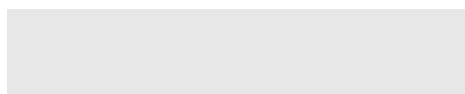
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