



Andrew Pallotta, executive vice president of New York State United Teachers. | AP Photo/Mike Groll

Seismic national election leaves dynamic intact for New York education policy

By **KESHIA CLUKEY** | 11/11/16 05:19 AM EST

ALBANY — Though education advocates and state leaders are still waiting for the post-election smoke to clear at the federal level, the situation in New York State is largely status quo, analysts said.

“There’s no altered political balance in New York as a result of this election, so I think continuity in the policy balance is likely,” said Gerald Benjamin, a professor of political science and director of The Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz.

The Democrats maintained control of the state Assembly, and the Republicans are poised to remain in control of the state Senate.

“It was a very significant outcome, because it was in a presidential year,” Benjamin said. “I was expecting a loss of two to four seats for the Republicans. ... Most people don’t realize how much of an uphill slog it is for Republicans in a presidential year in New York.”

New York Republicans were aided in their efforts to keep control of the Senate by independent expenditures from charter groups. New Yorkers for a Balanced Albany, managed by the pro-charter school group StudentsFirstNY, spent \$3.9 million helping Republicans who won their races and only \$27,750 backing candidates who decisively lost, POLITICO New York reported.

“StudentsFirstNY looks forward to continuing to work with the bipartisan leadership on behalf of all students in New York State,” the group’s executive director Jenny Sedlis said in an emailed statement to POLITICO New York. “These leaders have shown that they truly understand the importance of school choice and quality schools for kids, especially those who need it most.”

And the charters’ show of power “presents a balance to the teachers’ union’s influence that didn’t previously exist in education,” Benjamin said.

Efforts by the teachers’ unions were not as successful in the Senate. In total, only three percent of the \$3.9 million New York State United Teachers spent in this year’s Senate general elections supported candidates who won — with several efforts to put Democrats in failing. Unions, though, remain closely aligned with the Democratic-lead Assembly.

NYSUT executive vice president Andrew Pallotta said Wednesday the state’s largest teachers’ union was the same organization it was prior to the election.

“We would hope that the Senate would see that the overwhelming majority of the students in this state go to public schools,” Pallotta said. “We want to see even more money going to the public schools so that we just keep making them better.”

With focus on the Common Core learning standards and teacher evaluations largely on hold as the state Education Department conducts its reviews, the major effort this upcoming session will be on funding, said David Bloomfield, a professor of education leadership at Brooklyn College and at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

Otherwise, the “state situation is pretty much status quo,” he said.

As in previous years, this means the Senate Republicans will likely push for increased funding for charters, as well as the education tax credit legislation which would provide a

credit for donations made to public and nonprofit schools and scholarship funds. The tax credit has failed to make it through the Assembly in recent years.

The Senate majority will likely push to expand or eliminate the cap on charters across the state, which would have the most impact on New York City.

Though they'll be protected, the charter advocates will have a hard time making further substantial gains, Benjamin said. "They still have to get all three political institutions to agree."

And with the balance between the Senate and the Assembly intact, Cuomo, a Democrat, will be able to continue with decisions that fall along his party's lines, Benjamin said.

The fate of education policy and aid increases will largely depend on the fiscal circumstances of the state, which could be influenced by Donald Trump's administration if it decides to constrain federal spending, he said.

Trump's win also opens the possibility of Cuomo running for president in 2020, which may accelerate the relationship the governor recently started building with the teachers' unions, Bloomfield said.

But overall on statewide education policy, this "seems to be a time where everybody is taking a deep breath, from the Regents to the commissioner to the governor to the Legislature," Bloomfield said.