

Northville Central School District

STATEMENT FOR THE ROCKEFELLER INSTITUTE HEARING

Submitted by the Northville BOED & Dr. Sarah A. Chauncey, Superintendent

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If a funding formula fails to account for a school's value to its community or the unique socioeconomic conditions of that community, equity is at risk. Formulas that rely solely on quantitative metrics like property values and income levels, without considering nuances such as high-value properties owned by non-residents, can paint an inaccurate picture of a district's actual wealth and resources available to support its schools. A purely data-driven approach neglects the vital role that schools play in small, rural communities which extends beyond academics to include cross-generational social interaction and collective pride. Only by taking a more nuanced approach can we look beyond numbers to consider the important roles schools play in their communities. We are asking that you develop funding models that are truly equitable and enable all districts, regardless of size or location, to provide the high-quality education their students deserve.

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In the following pages, we expand on these core beliefs.

NORTHVILLE CSD

Small, rural school districts like Northville CSD play an essential role in the education and well-being of their communities. These districts face challenges such as higher per-pupil costs, limited resources, and geographic isolation, yet *they consistently provide a nurturing, personalized learning environment that fosters academic success, social-emotional development, and strong community support.* By investing in small, rural schools, we not only ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education, but we also strengthen the social factors and economics of rural communities. We are asking for a more equitable approach to school funding that acknowledges the value of small, rural schools and provides them with the resources they need to continue serving their students and communities with excellence. We need your help in recognizing that our schools are the heart and soul of the communities they serve.

Northville CSD and our village exemplify the very best of what education and life in a small community can offer.

Northville CSD receives only 36.92% in state aid compared to neighboring districts, despite having a similar percentage of economically disadvantaged students (53%). The current state aid allocation model leaves Northville CSD at a disadvantage, impeding its ability to provide equitable educational opportunities and forcing expenditure reductions that affect staffing, academics, social-emotional learning, and professional development. Northville CSD is seeking an equitable approach to funding that considers the true economic challenges of the district.

We are proposing an increase in state aid from the current 36.92% to 48%, which would allow us to develop budgets that are within the tax levy cap. The use of high-value lakefront properties as a proxy for the district's overall wealth seems to misrepresent the economic realities faced by a significant portion of the population. The disparity in state aid compared to neighboring districts with similar levels of economically disadvantaged students further highlights the need for a more equitable approach to funding.

SUPPORTING SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Instead of consolidating small, rural schools into larger regional entities, we are advocating for alternative solutions that address the funding challenges while preserving the benefits of small, community-based schools. This could include revising the state aid allocation formulas to better account for the unique needs of small, rural districts, providing targeted grants or subsidies to support essential programs and services, and exploring partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and higher education institutions to enhance educational opportunities.

Educational Excellence & Opportunities: Small, rural schools like Northville CSD are often better equipped to provide individualized attention and support to students, as teachers and staff are more familiar with each student's needs and background. This personalized approach can contribute to better academic outcomes and positive social-emotional development. We offer vertical collaboration where young students are learning alongside older students in STEM and other learning and socialization activities. Our hydroponics lab and outdoor learning center were designed and built in-house by our teachers and facilities staff. Our fabrication lab offers students hands-on experience with industry-level computer-aided design software and technology to generate products from student designs. Several fabrication projects supported community spaces and local businesses. Our students are earning college credits - as many as 30 by graduation - by partnering with colleges and universities. These partnerships have been in place for several years. In 2024-25, in collaboration with SUNY Fulton Montgomery, Northville CSD will offer a business microcredential – **the first of its kind in New York State.** *Innovation, collaboration, and frugality are central to our efforts when designing*

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Interestingly, large schools have tried to recreate small learning environments — schools within a school. Some charter schools emerge from large schools to offer students smaller learning environments.

School Climate and Safety: With its smaller student body, Northville CSD has fostered a positive school climate, with lower incidences of violence, drug issues, and other disciplinary problems. Smaller schools often provide a more nurturing and supportive environment, where students feel known and valued by their teachers and peers. We have no problems with violence, drug use, or bullying. Our village Chief of Police visits our school daily and is also an NCSD athletic coach. The village is supportive of him being an integral part of our school at no cost.

REGIONALIZATION IMPACT

Community Engagement And Support: Northville CSD is deeply embedded in the fabric of the community, serving as a hub for academic, social, and athletic activities. The strong community support, as evidenced by the high turnout for school events and the success of school teams, demonstrates the value placed on the school by the residents. *Regionalization would disrupt this close-knit community dynamic and potentially erode the sense of belonging and pride that contributes to student success.*

Transportation And Access: Regionalization often involves longer bus rides and increased travel times for students, particularly in rural areas where homes are spread far apart. This can lead to earlier mornings, later evenings, and less time for students to engage in extracurricular activities, complete homework, or spend time with family. Furthermore, longer travel times can pose challenges for families without reliable transportation, creating barriers to parental involvement and student participation in school events.

Economic Impact: Small, rural schools are often significant employers in their communities and contribute to the local economy through job creation and the purchase of goods and services. Regionalization could lead to job losses and reduced economic activity in the community, further exacerbating the challenges faced by rural areas.

HOLD HARMLESS

The state's argument that Northville CSD has been overfunded by approximately \$12 million due to its "hold harmless" status is misleading and fails to consider the purpose of this provision. The "hold harmless" principle was implemented specifically to ensure that districts receive the necessary resources to serve their students effectively. To suggest that Northville CSD has been overfunded simply because it has benefited from this provision is to ignore the very reason for its existence. The \$12 million in additional funding over the years has likely been crucial in allowing this district, and many other districts, to maintain the quality of education and support services it provides to its students, despite the inherent challenges faced by small, rural schools. **Rather than viewing this as evidence of overfunding, it should be seen as recognition of the importance of "hold harmless" in ensuring that all districts have the resources they need to serve their students effectively.**

RESIDENT WEIGHTED AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE (RWADA)

The issue of schools with higher Resident Weighted Average Daily Attendance (RWADA) receiving a higher percentage of state aid, despite having similar socioeconomic challenges, **further highlights the inequities in the funding model.** Small, rural districts like Northville CSD often have lower student enrollment numbers, which translates to a lower RWADA. However, the fixed costs of running a school district, such as maintaining facilities, providing essential services, and retaining quality staff, remain relatively constant regardless of the number of students. This puts small districts at a disadvantage when state aid is allocated based on RWADA.

We are advocating for a more nuanced approach to state aid allocation that takes into account factors beyond RWADA, such as the fixed costs of running a district, the unique challenges faced by small, rural schools, and the need to provide equitable resources to all students, regardless of their district's size.

The current funding model fails to account for the unique challenges faced by small, rural districts, such as limited economies of scale, higher transportation costs due to geographic spread, and difficulty in offering a wide range of educational programs and services. These factors contribute to the higher per-pupil costs in small districts, which are not adequately addressed by the state aid formulas. The combination of lower RWADA and smaller budgets makes it increasingly difficult for small, rural districts to provide the same level of educational opportunities and support services as larger districts, even when they serve student populations with similar socioeconomic challenges. This creates an equity gap that disadvantages students in small, rural communities.

State aid allocation should ensure that all students, regardless of their district's size or location, have access to a high-quality education and the necessary support services. The current model's reliance on RWADA and failure to account for the unique challenges of small, rural districts perpetuates a system that fails to provide equitable educational opportunities. *We are advocating for a more nuanced approach to state aid allocation that takes into account factors beyond RWADA, such as the fixed costs of running a district, the unique challenges faced by small, rural schools, and the need to provide equitable resources to all students, regardless of their district's size.*

SUMMARY

Help us to preserve this model of learning and living in a remarkable community.

In summary, we ask that you recognize the value of these schools for children, families, and communities. **We are advocating for the importance of living and learning in a small, tight-knit community. Northville CSD and our village exemplify the very best of what education and life in a small community can offer.** Our school serves as the center of our village, fostering not only academic growth but also a deep sense of belonging, shared values, and collective pride. We ask you to recognize the value of this relationship and provide the necessary support to ensure that our learning community continues to flourish. We are making some big asks for sure, but we have done our homework and we are very conservative. When Board President, Carolyn Wilcox spoke to our New York State

Education Department officials, we were asked, "What will you do if you do not get one of the four financial "asks" we requested? She responded, "We will make it work." We are a resilient school and community, and "we will make it work" as we have been doing for the past few decades as our state aid has fallen and we have had to rely more heavily on our community. We thrive in the face of fiscal challenges and inequities. Help us to preserve this model of learning and living in a remarkable community.