

Testimony for the Rockefeller Institute of Government's Hearing on the Foundation Aid Formula

July 16, 2024

Good evening, everyone, I am Sandy Wong, a kindergarten teacher in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx. This is my 24th year of teaching. I am speaking on the urgent need to reform New York State's Foundation Aid formula. The formula is failing our most vulnerable students, particularly those in the low-income communities where I teach. We should implement a sliding scale that allocates substantially more funds to schools with higher percentages of students from low-income families, English language learners and students with disabilities. We need a Foundation Aid formula that truly serves all our children, regardless of their zip code or family income.

At my school, PS 30, I have many students living in shelters or in uncertain housing situations doubled up with extended families. We used to have two full-time social workers/coordinators in my school building assigned to work with students living in temporary housing. One left and was never replaced to provide trauma-informed counseling, parent outreach, crisis support, home visits, etc.

The current formula treats all students equally, but here's the truth — all NYC students don't start on an equal footing. In the Bronx, we're not just teaching reading and math. We're battling poverty, hunger and trauma. Our students are coming to school without breakfast, hungry and worried about where they'll sleep at night. Some are learning English for the first time; others are navigating learning disabilities. And yet, our funding doesn't reflect these enormous challenges.

Every child deserves the chance for a fair and equitable funding formula, especially vulnerable students in low-income communities. We need a formula that recognizes the actual needs of our students and understands that equality in funding doesn't create equity in education. Thank you for your time!