



# ISLAND TREES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Education  
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Superintendent  
Charles J. Murphy

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Rockefeller Institute of Rockefeller  
411 State Street  
Albany, NY 12203

Dear Rockefeller Institute,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to contribute to SUNY's Rockefeller Institute of Government's comprehensive study of New York State's Foundation Aid education funding formula. While I may not be an expert on the intricacies of the funding formula, I have extensive experience witnessing its impacts with almost two decades as a school superintendent in two middle-class districts.

These districts, while not impoverished, are also not wealthy, and have faced significant challenges due to the state aid formula. During good state aid years, we have successfully built programs and services that support our students and enhance academic performance. However, the inconsistent nature of state aid, with more bad years than good, forces us into a cycle of building and then dismantling these valuable student programs. This cycle is particularly disheartening for middle-class districts like ours, which lack the financial cushion of affluent districts and do not receive the same level of protection as low-wealth districts during funding cuts.

My current district, Island Trees in Nassau County, illustrates these challenges. With a school budget of \$79,961,570, we strive to provide high-quality education despite the financial constraints. We have a diverse community, with over 25% of our students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, and yet, we consistently perform above the county average academically. Our success is a testament to the hard work and determination of our staff, students, and community.

However, the current funding formula does not adequately support districts like ours. For example:

- **Jericho:** This affluent district has a budget of approximately \$140 million, with \$43,390 budget dollars per student. Their substantial resources allow them to offer extensive programs and services and cushion the impact of state aid fluctuations.
- **Oyster Bay-Norwich:** With a budget of \$65,663,880 for 1,359 students, this district allocates \$48,318 per student. Their financial stability enables them to maintain programs and services even during economic downturns.
- **Roosevelt:** This low-wealth district has 2,947 students and a budget of \$146,713,706, translating to \$49,784 per student. The significant state support they receive is crucial for addressing their students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

In contrast, Island Trees, with a Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) in the bottom 20% for Nassau County, struggles to maintain programs and services year after year. Our budget translates to approximately \$36,646 budget dollars per student, significantly lower than the aforementioned districts. This inequality forces us to make difficult decisions, cutting essential programs during bad state aid years and attempting to rebuild them when funding improves.

These examples highlight the need for a more equitable funding formula that addresses the unique challenges of all districts, including middle-class ones. I am concerned that a revision of the formula might solve some problems while creating new ones. It is essential that the needs of districts like Island Trees are considered in your recommendations.

In conclusion, I appreciate the Rockefeller Institute's efforts to revise the current formula. I urge lawmakers to consider the impact on middle-class students and school communities, ensuring that all students, staff, and communities receive the support they deserve. Thank you for your time and for undertaking this important task. I hope your work will help all New York students thrive.

Sincerely,



Charles J. Murphy  
Superintendent of Schools

cc: NY State Education Commissioner  
Governor Hochul  
State Senator  
State Legislator