



July, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments about the Foundation Aid formula. I suspect that nothing stated in my comments will be new to you, since those of us in the field have shared experiences with State Aid that translate into what we think needs to be changed in the Foundation Aid formula.

I think the most obvious problem is, as you are well aware, that the Foundation Aid formula takes into account outdated census data from the year 2000. Our district is not the same as it was nearly a quarter century ago, and schools are also not the same: we are providing more essential services to families and students such as mental health support, social and emotional wellness, meals, support for students in temporary housing, non-English speaking students, and much more. This is in addition to providing core academics, STEM, college credit-bearing courses, support for students with disabilities, career and technology programs and absorbing ever increasing mandates from the State. The Foundation Aid formula has not kept pace with these realities.

The poverty rate has increased in our district since the year 2000 Census, and we are a Community Eligibility Provision District, which qualifies all students for free breakfast and lunch. It is great for our families and students, but it presents us with challenges in trying to collect Free and Reduced meal data, and that has caused our data to artificially decline. The way this is calculated in the formula needs to take this into account and current data must be used.

The Governor and Legislature both want a "sustainable" Foundation Aid model, and the field agrees. But it also needs to be predictable so that we can plan on behalf of students and taxpayers. Part of predictability is assuring that funding cannot be reduced based on the status of the State budget or for political reasons and that Foundation Aid comes with no strings or mandates that take away local decision-making. Additional mandates should not be tied to Foundation Aid.

The state has to ensure that all districts have the necessary resources to provide a sound basic education. The basic per pupil amount (or Foundation Amount) must be updated- it has been stagnant since 2012. The Pupil

Needs Index should be revised to incorporate the current realities districts face and the Weighted Pupil Count should be revised within the various pupil counts, including students with disabilities.

Foundation Aid is the State's most powerful tool for ensuring that all students in New York have the same opportunities. It is a monumental public policy achievement that should serve as a model for the rest of the country. Updating it and guaranteeing it to districts will only make it a stronger and more essential tool to help schools achieve their goals of preparing students for success, supporting families and standing as beacons of hope, stability, and pride in each of their communities.

