



Education Campus
355 Harlem Road, West Seneca, NY 14224

Foundation Aid Study Public Hearing: Rockefeller Institute

Testimony Submitted by Michael Capuana, Ed.D.

District Superintendent/Chief Executive Officer of Erie 1 BOCES

July 25, 2024

Introduction

Good afternoon distinguished representatives of the Rockefeller Institute of Government. My name is Dr. Michael Capuana and I am here representing the Erie 1 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), one of 37 BOCES in New York State. We are a regional educational cooperative serving 19 school districts with varying socio-economic statuses across Erie County, ultimately impacting over 65,000 school-aged children. Our organization provides K-12 and adult workforce development programming, administrative support, and technology solutions to our component school districts. We also host the Western New York Regional Information Center, or WNYRIC, which supports the technology needs of over 100 school districts across seven counties. Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective regarding equitable and sustainable education funding.

The Foundation Aid formula, central to New York State's school funding since 2007, has been essential in supporting the success of all school districts across the state. However, significant socio-economic and educational shifts over the past 17 years necessitate a thorough review and updating of this formula. We appreciate your efforts to ensure future iterations meet the evolving educational needs of all children.

Foundation Aid and BOCES

Although we do not receive Foundation Aid, the sustained financial health of our component school districts directly impacts our capacity to offer robust, innovative, and efficient educational opportunities and support. Consistent and equitable funding through Foundation Aid allows Erie 1 BOCES to sustain important services with the goal of ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to a quality educational experience.

Confirming Viewpoints

We advocate for a Foundation Aid formula that is more equitable, predictable, and flexible¹. Funding must be based on student needs, which have and will continue to evolve as district demographics change. For Erie 1 BOCES, this means continuing to anticipate and respond with essential student programming and services for our 19 component school districts.

Regional Impact

Locally, we have prioritized an increased focus to expand our capacity to support school districts as we collectively strive to serve a growing number of historically underserved and often marginalized student populations.

More specifically, across Erie 1 BOCES' 19 component school districts:

- Since the 2000 Census, school-aged children in Western New York living in poverty has increased ² by 40%

¹ Educational Conference Board "Foundation Aid—What's Next?", October 2023
https://www.nyscos.org/nyscosdocs/Advocacy2324/2310_ECB_Foundation_Aid_Principles_and_Process.pdf

² See the enclosed data chart "Children Aged 5-17 Below Poverty"

Also, over the course of the last decade:

- Students classified with disabilities³ have increased by 13% and
- Students identified as English Language Learners⁴ have increased by 129%.

Updating the Foundation Aid formula, which currently relies on outdated and disparate data, is critical in supporting our efforts to serve children and school districts effectively.

Regional Convening Role

BOCES across New York State play a vital role as regional conveners, providing innovative solutions for county-wide educational needs. I would like to offer three examples of Erie 1 BOCES' initiatives that rely on adequate district funding for the betterment of students across the region:

First, we are actively developing an Exceptional Education expansion plan tailored to meet the increasing demand for special education services and student placements across Erie County.

Second, following the pandemic and through partnership with multiple districts and agencies, we initiated the Western New York Supporting Mental Health and Advocating for Resources Together, also known as the SMART Collaborative, to promote mental health support for youth and families in Erie County.

Finally, we actively collaborate with our districts and higher education colleagues to address teacher and leader shortages on a regional level.

These initiatives are possible due to partnership and predictable education funding. Moreover, the recent Blue Ribbon Commission recommendations will require school systems to adapt and adjust. No doubt, this will demand ongoing regional collaboration. At its core, Foundation Aid provides the financial stability for Erie 1 BOCES to lead regional collaboration and directly support necessary educational reform efforts.

Conclusion

In short, we are advocating for equitable access and high-quality educational opportunities for all learners. Erie 1 BOCES serves urban, suburban, and rural communities, each with unique needs. Neighboring districts can vastly differ, and funding based on simple enrollment figures oversimplifies complex issues. We support the Rockefeller Institute of Government's comprehensive review of the Foundation Aid formula.

In addition to modernizing the formula at the state level, I believe there is a parallel and emerging opportunity to address evolving educational needs at a local level through meaningful dialogue and innovative regional solutions.

Foundation Aid is a critical issue in education and in the development of our state identity and potential. This decision will contribute to the story of what Western New York and New York State will look like in the future. We must ask ourselves what we want this story to be. How might we better support our students, educators, and families to articulate and enact this vision? The students sitting in local classrooms today will determine the future success of New York State; therefore, access to quality educational experiences should not simply be determined by location.

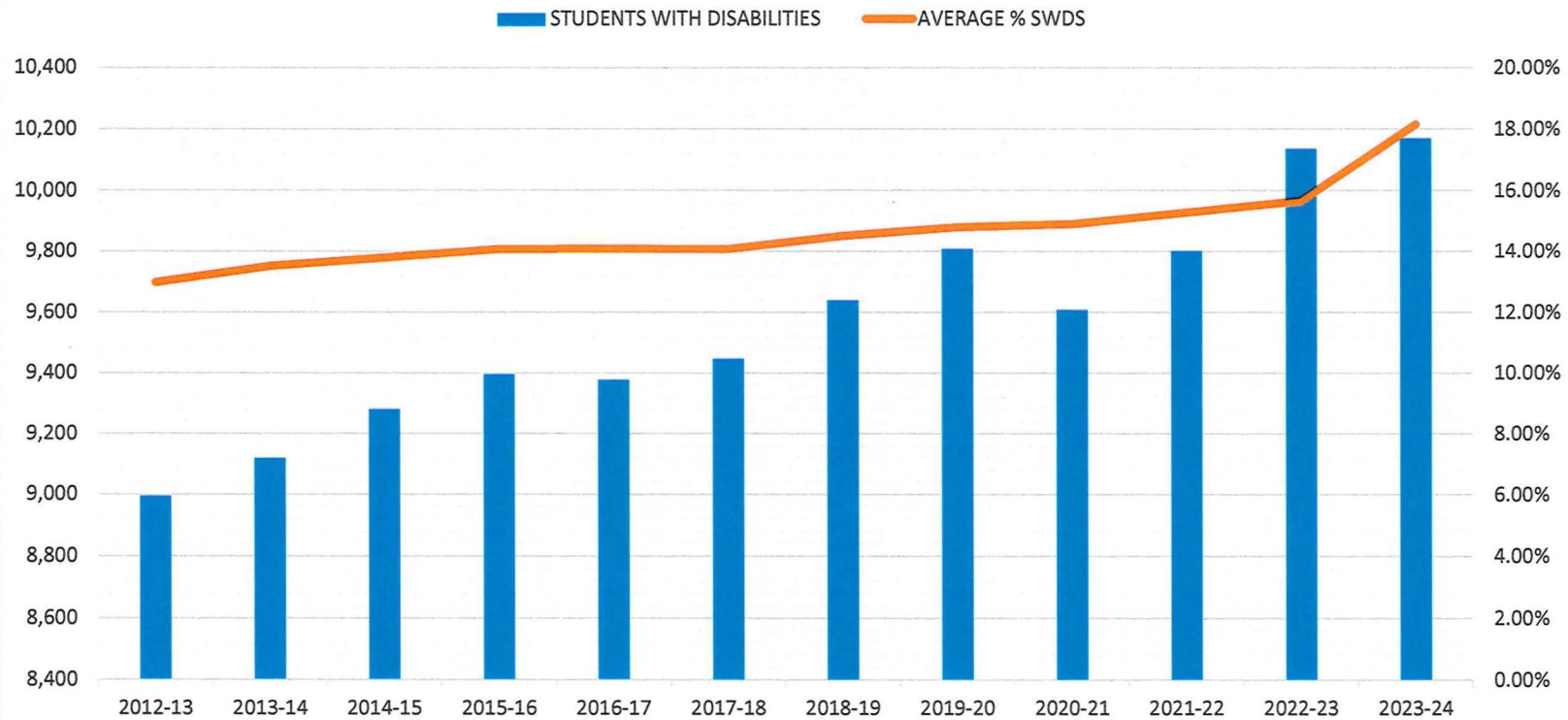
By addressing current deficiencies in the funding formula and incorporating a contemporary understanding of our shared educational needs, New York State can ensure all students have the resources necessary for a sound, basic education and a successful future.

Thank you for your time.

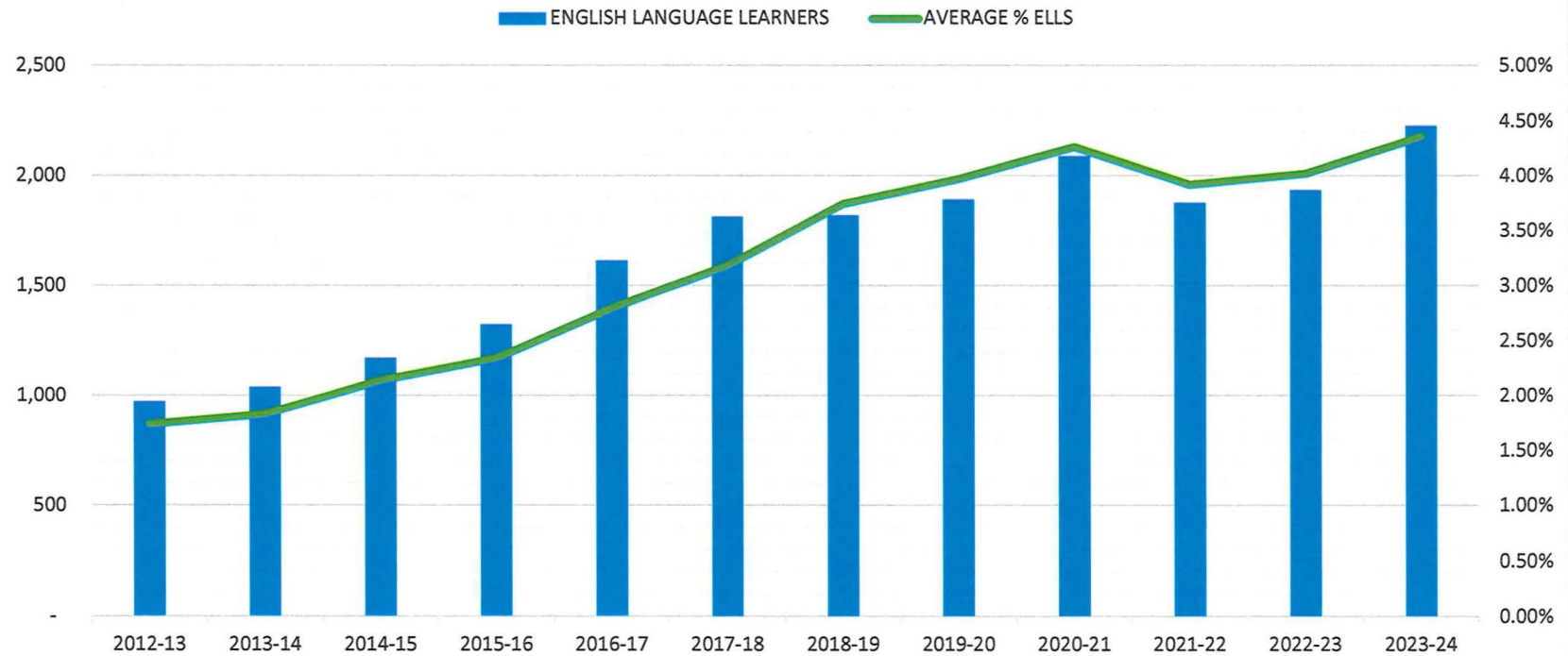
³ See the enclosed data chart "Students with Disabilities Population"

⁴ See the enclosed data chart "English Language Learner Population"

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POPULATION ERIE 1 BOCES COMPONENTS

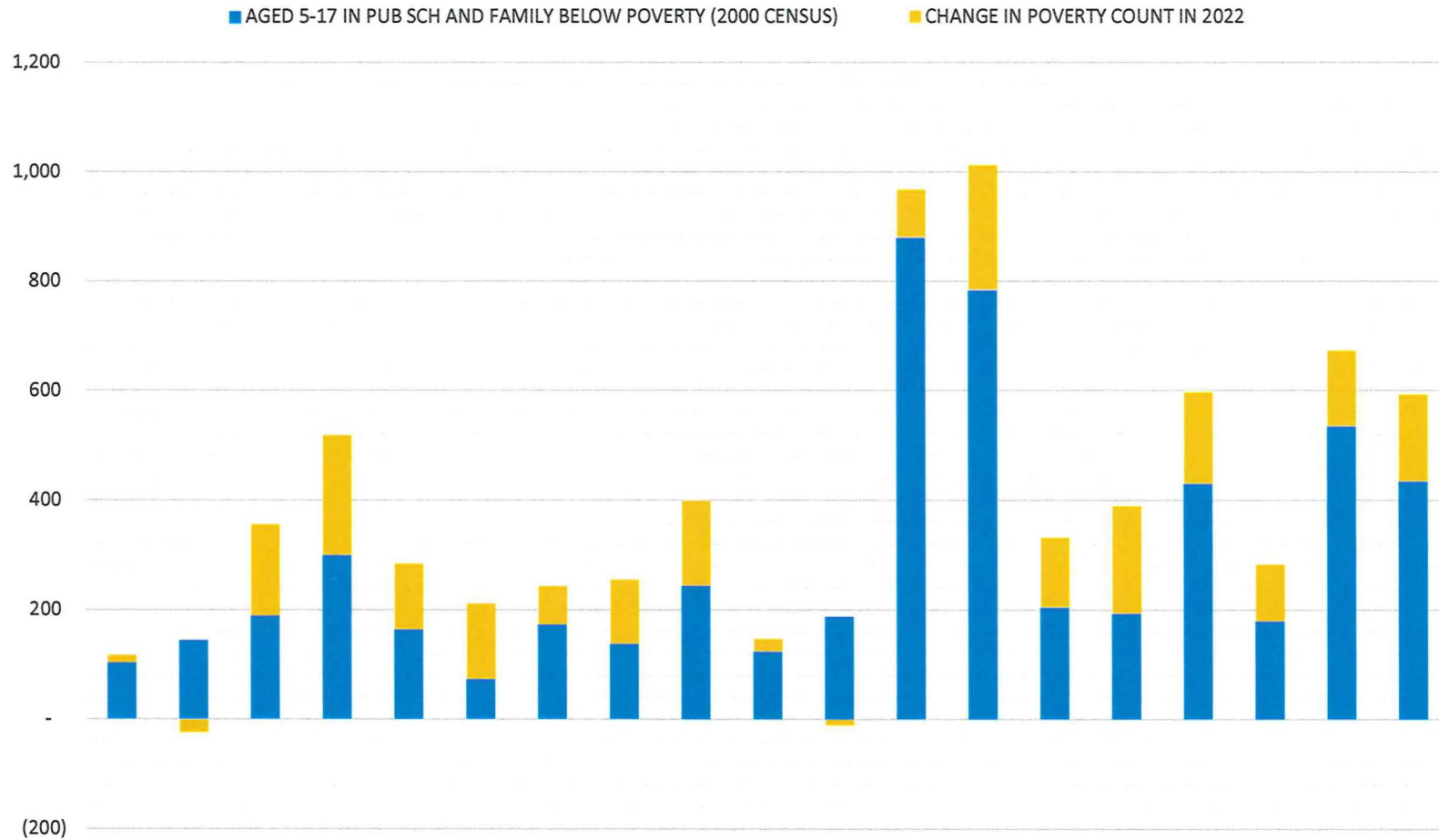


ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER POPULATION ERIE 1 BOCES COMPONENTS



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CHILDREN AGED 5-17 BELOW POVERTY ERIE 1 BOCES COMPONENTS



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CHANGE IN POVERTY COUNT ERIE 1 BOCES COMPONENTS

