



ROCKLAND COUNTY  
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

July 28, 2024

Dear Senator Weber,

My name is Deborah P. Gatti and I am the President of the Rockland County School Boards Association. We represent the eight school districts and Rockland BOCES. I reside in Garnerville, NY and have been a member of the North Rockland School Board for 22 years. I have been a member of the Rockland BOCES Board for 8 years. Foundation Aid and the Foundation Aid Formula have been a topic of discussion around the County table for as long as I can remember. The fact that the formula is only understood by a handful of individuals at the state level speaks volumes. The use of antiquated data says more about the state's commitment to public education than any other indicator.

Over the last 20 years we have seen many changes occur in our county. The number of English Language Learners has risen significantly, as has the number of students entering our schools who are not proficient in their first language. The number of children with a disrupted education has also increased. The poverty level has risen dramatically. In North Rockland alone we are at 63% and we believe that number is actually higher. The number of students with special needs has risen dramatically and regional costs are soaring. We have watched the demographics change in all of our districts and yet our foundation aid has fallen further and further behind.

According to this year's report from Patterns for Progress, Rockland County has the highest rents in the region and the lowest hourly wage rate. That alone should set off alarm bells when it comes to funding the schools in our county. We see children everyday who not only aren't sure where they will live next but they don't know where their next meal is coming from! Rockland County has the highest 2 bedroom fair market value rent. \$400 a month higher than Westchester! Let me repeat that, \$400 more a month than Westchester and the average hourly wage is \$15.47.

That means that a single worker has to work 137 hours per week to afford their rent. That translates to working more than 3 full time jobs! And the data used by NYS is more than 20 years old. Our schools are clearly not what they were 20 years ago! The needs of our county are no longer what they were 20 years ago. Our Foundation Aid formula does not reflect the needs of our students and families and the burden of meeting those needs cannot be transferred to homeowners and businesses. The State of New York needs to do its part.

As you may know, our organization has discussed foundation aid at its annual advocacy day for many years and we are recommending the following:

- **Update school data in the foundation aid formula to ensure that increasing student needs, changes in enrollment, recent poverty data, appropriate regional costs, and special education needs are reflected.**
- **Establish a mechanism to regularly re-evaluate and update the formula to reflect nuanced poverty measures, the true cost of educating ENL and special needs students, accurate regional cost indices, and the effect of the tax levy cap on the community portion of school funding.**
- **Amend the regional cost index of the lower Hudson Valley to reflect the high cost of operating in the suburbs of NYC.**
- **Maintain a full funding of the current foundation aid formula with annual increases to recognize the ongoing inflationary costs that districts incur and commit to fully funding an updated formula focused on the current needs of our state.**

We hope that you will take our concerns to heart and work to help Rockland County schools with their funding needs. Our data is easily collected and we are willing to work with you and your state partners to provide you the necessary information and resources you need. Thank you for your time and as always, please feel free to reach out to our organization to discuss your concerns.

Regards,

*Deborah P. Gatti*

Debroah P. Gatti  
President