



## **Alliance of New York State YMCAs**

### **Testimony for Rockefeller Institute Foundation Aid Study**

**August 2024**

The Alliance of New York State YMCAs is grateful for the opportunity to provide written input on potential changes to the New York State Foundation Aid formula.

The YMCA is committed to nurturing the potential of every child and teen. From cradle to career, the Y empowers young people to lead inspired, successful lives.

In 2023, YMCAs reported 542 unique collaborations with educational institutions across the State. Collaboration between schools and community-based organizations helps to create a holistic continuum of programs, from early child care and pre-kindergarten to school-age summer camp and afterschool activities, YMCAs and local school districts support the development and journey of youth and teens so they feel inspired and empowered to forge their future.

Funding provided to the State's education system via the Foundation Aid formula has a profound impact on all students. The Alliance recognizes and applauds the historic investments that have been made to fully fund Foundation Aid, and Governor Hochul's commitment to maintaining these investments.

While New York State has recently taken steps to invest in the educational system, years of underfunding has created deep disparities, which has disproportionately impacted students of color, students living in poverty, and low-income families. According to a 2023 report from the Alliance for Quality Education, chronic underfunding, particularly in districts with high need, has

systemically contributed to reduced opportunity and poorer educational outcomes for students.<sup>1</sup>

The Rockefeller Institute study and solicitation of input from partners in the education system and community stakeholders is both necessary and welcome during this opportune time. In addition to updates and improvements to the formula itself, the Alliance urges New York State to both evaluate and invest comprehensively in the education system – not only to begin to remedy years of underfunding that was only exacerbated by the pandemic, but to forward a more equitable system in which all students can be empowered to reach their full potential.

## **Recommendations**

### *Study Timeline and a Broader, Strategic Policy Agenda*

The Alliance urges consideration of the study's timeline and would welcome the study's process and implications to be considered as part of a broader strategic agenda to make improvements and updates to the State's education system, in addition to the Foundation Aid formula.

While we understand that this process will culminate in a final report that includes discussion of policy options in the context of the findings, the Alliance would like to highlight this opportunity to engage lawmakers in the coming legislative session. We urge the importance of continuing to engage stakeholders throughout the process and remaining mindful of opportunities to extend beyond the context of the study to improve the State's education system and funding landscape.

### *The Study's Role in Child Poverty Measurements*

The current Foundation Aid formula uses dated measurements of defining child poverty – such as the number of students eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program (FRL) and the number of school-aged children in families below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) threshold.

In alignment with other advocacy partners, the Alliance recommends that the study explore alternative measurements, such as enrollment in means tested programs such as Medicaid and explore the use of tiers of socioeconomic status, rather than a definitive yes/no poverty weight.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Moving-New-York-Toward-Educational-Equity.pdf>

Evaluating child poverty measures with a more nuanced lens can often reveal an even higher need and larger concentration of poverty in certain school districts, which can help the State to allocate resources accordingly.

As an organization dedicated to meeting the needs of communities, the YMCA can help close gaps by participating in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Additionally, YMCAs can refer and help families to enroll in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to increase access to healthy food. **However, educational and future outcomes improve when we don't just close the gap – but support children from the start, holistically.** This study has the opportunity to redefine poverty and address systemic underfunding and break down barriers that can help more students to thrive.

#### *Define the True, Base Cost of Education*

As a community partner, YMCAs work in partnership with districts to provide services and support to as many families and students as possible. In many cases, the true cost of providing care is unknown, or a discrepancy exists between the base cost and state reimbursement.

New York State currently determines the formula cost using a school district model, which has not been evaluated and updated by the State Education department in over a decade. As a result, districts that differ from the model derived from the original district may be impacted in disproportionate ways.

The Alliance raises the opportunity for this study to explore other effective models in determining the base cost formula for providing education to students.

#### **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments. The Alliance of New York State YMCAs is pleased to contribute to the upcoming study of the State's Foundation Aid Formula.

Please direct questions to the Alliance of New York State YMCAs Director of Public Policy, Maggie Dickson, at [mdickson@ymcanys.org](mailto:mdickson@ymcanys.org).