



Clinton - Essex - Warren - Washington BOCES  
P.O. Box 455, Plattsburgh, NY 12901

**CVES MISSION**

Champlain Valley Educational Services is committed to being a valued and trusted partner by supporting students, schools, and communities to excel through high-quality education, training, and shared services.

**Rockefeller Institute of Government  
Foundation Aid Study Public Hearing #5:  
Guilderland High School, Guilderland CSD, Albany, NY**

Testimony Submitted by Mark C. Davey, Ed.D.

District Superintendent/Chief Executive Officer of Champlain Valley Educational Services  
(Clinton-Essex-Warren-Washington BOCES)

Wednesday, August 14, 2024

**Dear President Megna and Esteemed Representatives of the Rockefeller Institute of Government,**

My name is Dr. Mark Davey, and I am honored to present my testimony as District Superintendent on behalf of Champlain Valley Educational Services (CVES) BOCES – officially known as Clinton-Essex-Warren-Washington (CEWW) BOCES, is one of the 37 BOCES in New York State, serving 16 component districts that represent 13,500 students in the North Country. In addition to my role as District Superintendent, I also have the privilege of serving as Vice Chair of the Rural Schools Association (RSA) Board of Directors. My 40-year educational career has spanned urban, suburban, and rural districts across the State, with 33 years in administration and the last 16 years as a Superintendent, including 12 years in my current DS position in the North Country, my home region.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide insights and recommendations that reflect the unique challenges faced by school districts in upstate New York as you work to establish a fair, equitable, and sustainable Foundation Aid Formula for all school districts across New York State.

**Context and Unique Challenges**

Rural school districts, particularly in geographically isolated areas like ours, face a myriad of challenges that set us apart from urban and suburban districts. One of the most pressing issues is the challenge of sparsity, which complicates the allocation of resources and limits accessibility to a wide range of educational opportunities. The cost of providing essential services, including healthcare, is significantly higher in rural areas, exacerbating the financial burden on our districts. Furthermore, the harsh winter weather conditions in many parts of rural New York State increase the costs associated with maintaining educational facilities and managing transportation, often leading to unforeseen budgetary strains.

The State's tax cap limitations further restrict our financial resources, severely limiting our ability to generate sufficient local revenue to meet the needs of our students. This constraint places a greater reliance on State Aid allocations, which makes any modifications to the Foundation Aid formula critically important for the sustainability of our districts.

In addition to these financial and logistical challenges, the mental health needs of our students are a growing concern. Rural areas often lack sufficient mental health services and professionals to adequately support students, further complicating efforts to provide comprehensive educational and emotional support. A targeted approach that compensates for the inherent difficulties faced by rural districts is essential to ensure that every student, regardless of location, has access to the resources they need to thrive.

## **Key Recommendations**

### **1. Utilization of Updated, Accurate Data to Support the Base Per-Pupil Formula Calculation:**

The efficacy of the Foundation Aid formula is critically undermined by its reliance on outdated data. Demographic shifts, particularly the increasing numbers of students with disabilities (SWD), English Language Learners (ELL), homeless students, foster students, migrant students, and students from poverty.

### **2. Updated Poverty Measures:**

The reliance on Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) data as a measure of poverty is outdated and fails to capture the full extent of economic hardship experienced by families. Many of our districts are classified under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for school meals, which eliminates the need for families to complete FRPL paperwork, resulting in underreporting and an inaccurate reflection of true poverty levels within the district. An alternative metric, such as the United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data, provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of economic hardship. This approach better encapsulates the realities faced by working families who, despite being employed, struggle to meet basic needs.

### **3. Revising the Combined Wealth Ratio:**

The Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) often misrepresents the actual economic capacity of districts, particularly in areas with high property values but low resident wealth. This discrepancy is increasingly prevalent in many rural areas throughout New York State, especially where natural and scenic beauty has driven up property values. These high property values, often associated with second homes owned by individuals from outside the region, exacerbate the disparity between local resident wealth and assessed property values. The current 50%/50% formula, which equally weights property value and resident wealth, makes many regions of New York State appear wealthier than they truly are for these areas. Adjusting the CWR to better reflect true economic conditions—perhaps by offering an adjustable formula where the weighting can shift to 30%/70% depending on the factors that best represent the district's realities—would promote a more equitable funding landscape, addressing disparities between affluent and economically challenged districts.

### **4. Support for Regionalization:**

Regionalization presents a vital opportunity for rural districts to optimize resources, share services, and collaborate on educational initiatives, thereby enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of fund utilization. We encourage consideration of incentives for sharing services to support cost-saving measures. This financial support will incentivize and facilitate increased participation by all districts, ultimately fostering a more cohesive and resource-rich educational landscape.

**5. Formula Adjustment Phase-In Timeline and Implementation Considerations:**

Given the extensive recalibration required, we recommend considering an implementation timeline that allows New York State school districts the opportunity to plan and adjust to the economic impact. Maintaining “Hold-Harmless” for districts, and if not, providing a well-planned phase-in of adjustments to the inequalities of current regional cost indexes, should be carefully planned for and ensure essential predictability. For example, a phased implementation could begin with a 1–3-year initial phase, followed by a 3–5-year second phase, and finally a 5–10-year third phase for long-term sustainable changes and improvements. This timeline will allow districts and New York State to partner in school funding changes and Foundation Aid formula reform while supporting the recommendations of the New York State Education Department’s Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) and Graduation Measures to ensure student success. Long-term improvements and systemic reform of our School Foundation Formula must support best practices and student achievement. It is also recommended that this phase-in timeline be utilized to integrate educational research and best practices from national examples, other States that have successfully undertaken Educational Funding Formula Reform, Educational Policy advisors, and nationally renowned higher education colleagues for successful long-term reliability and validity.

**Conclusion**

Each region presents distinct challenges and opportunities that must be considered in the Foundation Aid formula. In the North Country and in rural areas throughout NYS, challenges are particularly pronounced and multifaceted. Addressing these unique regional factors in the Foundation Aid formula is imperative to ensure equitable and effective education across New York State.

Considering these recommendations may be helpful for developing a Foundation Aid Formula that is more equitable, responsive, and effective in addressing the diverse needs of students across the entire State. All students throughout New York State must have access to a comprehensive, high-quality education program with breadth and depth, regardless of their zip code, to ensure their constitutionally guaranteed path to graduation and beyond help support our students to be successful graduates and contributing citizens of NYS in the future who fulfill our State’s motto – “Excelsior” meaning “Ever Upward.”

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of these recommendations.