

Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Foundation Aid
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Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure the wellbeing of New York's children, families, and communities. **We are writing to ensure the foundation aid formula is updated to consider all necessary factors relevant to school funding to ensure our public schools are funded equitably.**

Every student in New York deserves a well-resourced and robust education; the Foundation Aid formula aims to ensure that this happens. While we are grateful for the State fully funding Foundation Aid in 2023, fulfilling the last step necessary to fulfill the campaign for fiscal equity settlement, the formula itself includes outdated and incomplete measures of need and has not evolved to account for the growing cost of providing a high quality education to all students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), students from low-income families, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care and others who need additional support.

Therefore, CCC, in tandem with partners across the State recommend the following to ensure public schools are equitably funded to uphold the constitutional right all students receive a sound basic education:

- **Replace the outdated “successful school district model” that has formed the base of the formula.** This model is based on the view that successful school districts are those where students perform well on standardized tests, with insufficient consideration to the needs of large urban districts. The State must ensure the new base rate reflects the actual cost of providing the academic, social-emotional, and holistic supports students need to succeed in school, including in large urban districts, with particular attention to students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless, and students in the foster system.
- **Reexamine the existing poverty weight to ensure the needs of students from low-income communities are accurately represented.** It is not sufficient to merely update Census data and the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; the State should explore alternative, more robust measures of poverty and economic disadvantage, including considering differentiated weights for different concentrations of poverty.
- **Add a per-pupil weight for students in temporary housing and students in the foster system.** More than 119,000 New York City students—roughly one in every nine—experienced homelessness in 2022–23 (the most recent year for which data are available), and 6,800 students spent time in the foster system. At present, the Foundation Aid formula does not provide any additional funding to help schools support these student populations, both of whom face tremendous obstacles to success in school and have educational needs distinct from those of all students in poverty.

- **Increase the weights for students with disabilities and ELLs to ensure they reflect the cost of providing legally required, high-quality classes, services, and supports and are adequate to address the wide spectrum of student needs.** This includes considering differentiated weights by program to better account for the tremendous diversity within both groups of students, neither of which is a monolith.
- **Update the Regional Cost Index to better reflect the rising costs of salaries and services.** This metric has been fixed since 2006 and is thus significantly out of date.
- **Provide resources to implement the State's new class size requirements.** The New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) has estimated that NYCPS will need between \$1.6 and \$1.9 billion annually to achieve full compliance with the law by the 2028 deadline, given the significant hiring needs associated with reducing class size—yet the State has allocated no additional funding to help NYCPS meet this legislative mandate, which applies to New York City alone.
- **Include funding for students in 3-K and Pre-K, as well as students with disabilities through the school year they turn 22.** Over the past decade, New York City has dramatically expanded access to early childhood education. The Foundation Aid formula, however, only covers grades K–12, a holdover from an earlier era in which a child's educational career was typically thought to begin at age five or six. Numerous studies have demonstrated the long-term benefits of high-quality preschool, and the Foundation Aid formula should be updated to reflect the needs of a unified P–12 system. In addition, the State recently affirmed that districts have a legal obligation to provide special education programs and services to students with disabilities until they turn 22 if they have not yet graduated, but the Foundation Aid formula does not provide funding for these students.

The importance of education cannot be overstated, especially as our students are building back from the pandemic disruptions. We urge state leaders to address the disparities by updating the formula and ensuring that students receive the funding they deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.