

Cold Spring Harbor Central School District Comments to Rockefeller Institute Foundation Aid Study

The Foundation Aid formula was created in 2007 after the 1995 decision that New York Schools should provide all children a “sound basic education.” There are two components of the formula; a base per pupil amount and a weighted pupil count to address specific student needs.

Cold Spring Harbor Central School district will concentrate its feedback on the base per pupil amount. For 2024/25, the base per pupil amount is \$8,040. The base amount has been increased, most years, by a consumer price index amount. From its inception in the 2007/08 school year until 2012/13 it was modified several times to try and address funding needs of a “successful school” as determined by a study that is now about 20 years old. The last modification to the base per pupil amount was 12 years ago!

In those 12 years, NYS public schools have faced tremendous challenges and mandates. The foundation aid per pupil base amount does not address any of these new challenges. The challenges include but are not limited to technology needs (hardware, software, and access), student mental health needs, cybersecurity enhancements, facility hardening, additional security staffing, new learning standards, student learning loss, significant family needs, lingering pandemic effects, and soaring cost increases that outpace CPI. These challenges are only exaggerated when we add in the soaring non-instructional costs of transportation, employee benefits and utilities. The strains to public schools that are saddled with an inadequate base per pupil amount coupled with the constraints of the tax cap legislation have made educating New York State students exceedingly difficult.

Cold Spring Harbor schools, by any measure and definition, is a “successful school.” Our graduation rate is over 98% and our students perform in the top 5% of NY State students on all standardized tests. Our students are the embodiment of “success,” and our schools are the definition of a “successful school.” We know that NY State wants the same success we enjoy at Cold Spring Harbor schools for all NY State students and as such, we offer our recommendations for a base per pupil amount going forward that ensures NY State students not only a sound basic education but a successful education that prepares them for the future they will live in. We propose the following:

- The per pupil base amount should be determined by looking to schools that are already the definition of success, like Cold Spring Harbor schools. We propose that the definition of a successful school should be the top 10% of schools in NY State based on graduation rate and on time graduation. After that is determined, collect expenditure data from these schools.

- o Collect expenditure data from the top performing 10% of public schools in NY State and back out the following non-instructional expenses that do not directly contribute to a “sound basic education”:

- Debt service

- Transportation
- Other non-instructional expenses (including benefits and administration)

o Also back out the costs for Special Education and English Language Learners as these costs are aided by weighting the base per pupil amount.

- Add the expenditures for the top 10% of districts and divide the total by the number of students in the top 10% of districts. This is the new base per pupil amount.

For Cold Spring Harbor schools, based on the above methodology, the base per pupil amount would be \$18,531 (based on 2022/23 data). When compared to the current 2024/25 base per pupil amount of \$8,040, it is easy to see that the current base per pupil amount is not adequate to educate a “successful student.”

We implore the Institute to recommend a base per pupil amount that recognizes the needs of today’s students, acknowledges the costs to educate a “successful” student and makes New York State the envy of all because we put children first!