

I am an educator from Astoria, Queens, and I work in District 24 at Bard High School Early College Queens. I have worked at this school for over a decade (14 years).

Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy and remains our best path to advancing equal opportunity at a time of deepening inequality. Public schools serve children of all abilities and identities and turn away no one. Adequately and equitably funding our public schools to meet the diverse needs of students is not just important; it is essential to ensuring their success and our shared prosperity. Prioritizing public education means investing in a just and prosperous future for all New Yorkers.

My public school is very diverse -- Bard High School Early College Queens (BHSECQ) in Long Island City, New York has a diverse student population, and the breakdown is below:

- Gender: 63% female, 37% male
- Race: 28.5% Hispanic, 26.5% Asian, 21.8% White, 19.1% African American, 2.8% Multiracial, 1% Pacific Islander, 0.3% Native American
- Economic status: 57% low-income students
- Disability status: 13% students with disabilities
- English language learners: 1% multilingual learners
- Economically disadvantaged: 61%

Students in my population face poverty, food insecurity and housing insecurity, in rare cases. There is also a high need for more mental health supports, as our population suffers from anxiety, depression, and a variety of other neurological disorders. For every 650 students there is only ONE social worker, and for every 215 students, there is only ONE guidance counselor (which I know is about average but is NOT adequate for teenagers!) We also only have ONE MLL teacher for our entire school, which takes in lots of Queens kids, many of whom are immigrants, so English is not their home language.

The student teacher ratio is 11:1, which is phenomenal, but **we still need to hire more Special Education teachers, MLL teachers, and guidance counselors for our kiddos.** There are not enough Special Education teachers for the needs of our students, who may struggle in an accelerated educational environment, which includes Early College courses. There is not enough time for these teachers to read and complete the writing of IEPs within the hours of our workday AND perform in the classroom with their co-teachers. Our Special Ed team is amazing, but they are exhausted and depleted – they need more time, which means we need to hire more SpEd teachers to relieve the heavy IEP meetings and writing burden that is placed upon them.

Something students in our community need but cannot access is mental health supports. We have one Social Worker, and we can only reference out therapists or the 311 services to our students, who cannot usually afford therapy in NYC. There is always a waitlist for free therapists and many students just go without. A student that I am close to has mentioned to me that she had suicidal thoughts, and even though she has a therapist, when I mentioned these incidents

also to the guidance counselor, they did not have time to address her needs in a timely fashion, so I had to spend hours with the student, even taking her to my classes with me. We need more mental health support. She is not an isolated incident.

Another student asked me to help her find Plan B and was scared to talk to the Social Worker – an important service that does not exist in all Public Schools is access to STI testing and contraception. We have condoms, but Plan B and testing should be freely available at all public high schools. I know John Bowne has this program in place, and it is very successful.

Broader context

Every child in New York has a constitutional right to a sound, basic education, and it is our government's responsibility to fund it, from Buffalo to Long Island, from the North Country to Southern Tier. The current Foundation Aid formula was created in 2007 to ensure that NYS was meeting this obligation, though it took until 2023 to bring schools to full funding levels. Over the past 17 years, the needs of students have evolved and grown tremendously, especially over the past 4 years since the pandemic began.

What do we want them to do?

The Foundation formula should be updated to reflect the real cost of educating students today, so that every public school has the resources it needs to support all students. Any modifications to the formula must be made on the basis of how much it costs to ensure public schools are getting the resources to meet their students' needs.

Underfunding public education is not “sustainable,” and not an option. The state's fiscal circumstances should not form the basis for calculating the true cost of educating a child. We cannot afford to deprive our kids of the resources and opportunities they need to succeed, and we cannot neglect to prepare them for life. Our children's future, and the future of our state, depends on it.

Signed,

Stephanie Kadison
educator Bard High School Early College Queens
School District 24