

**Port Chester - Rye UFSD Board of Education**  
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**Rockefeller Institute Foundation Aid Study**  
**Comments from *Port Chester - Rye UFSD***  
**September 2024**

Thank you for the opportunity for the Port Chester Board of Education to provide written feedback as you consider revisions to the data and formula of Foundation Aid to better reflect the reality of public education in 2024. The purpose of New York's Foundation Aid is to ensure that every school district has sufficient funding to provide students with a "sound, basic education". It is evident that schools nowadays provide so much more than simply, a sound, basic education; and that our students depend on the daily services and support provided to them.

After years of being underfunded, Port Chester has seen tremendous growth and progress in large part thanks to the commitment to fully fund the original formula. Below we have highlighted several areas that should be considered when making any revisions.

**Updating the Data**

The Foundation Aid formula, and the old data still used in the calculations, requires updating. Continuing to rely on the 2000 census, a 2003 successful schools study of education costs, and 2006 regional cost calculations is inappropriate in the year 2024.

**Predictability and Transparency**

School districts must be able to plan, and a critical piece of a fiscal forecast is estimating revenues on a multi-year basis. A predictable and understandable formula will allow districts to create multi-year plans and be prepared to present budgets to our communities in May without the stress of worrying about when New York State will agree upon a budget. School districts can not be expected to create or present a budget without concrete information of expected funding.

## **Local Costs Vary Tremendously in New York State**

Our district is part of a Regional Cost area that stretches northward through seven counties. A more nuanced approach that divides the state up into additional regions would better reflect the true costs of local districts, especially those of us within commuting distance to New York City. The village of Port Chester is also in a unique position being surrounded by more affluent towns.

## **Ensuring Student Needs are Met**

The roles and responsibilities of schools have evolved, as have the needs of our students. The base foundation amount should reflect the additional costs of what schools must provide for students to successfully graduate from high school and be prepared to be civically engaged, college or career ready, including:

- Providing meals at school for all students.
- Ensuring new transportation mandates, including zero-emission buses, are covered.
- Helping districts with aging buildings managing the regular costs of ventilation, excessive heat, and flooding in an era of climate change.
- Recognizing that the costs of physical security have increased post-Newtown, as have the costs of ensuring cybersecurity for district systems.
- Managing the increased mental health needs of our students.
- Developing improved curriculum and professional learning for our teachers, especially as new mandates (e.g., “science of reading”) are issued by New York State.
- Providing additional options for our students beyond school walls with greater provision of career and technical education (CTE) and guidance support to assist them into the next phase of their lives either in post-secondary education and/or the workforce.

## **Funding Additional Education Needs of Students**

Currently, the formula attempts to account for the additional educational needs of students with certain demographic characteristics– Economically Disadvantaged, English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities.

- **Economically Disadvantaged**

Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) is based on a nation-wide family income level that bears little resemblance to the cost of living in NYS – especially in the high-cost suburbs of the lower Hudson Valley. In addition, since the institution of the Foundation

Aid formula, many districts have only “counted” enough students periodically to maintain their Community Eligibility for the federal school meals program, thereby undercounting how many students in each district are eligible for FRPL.

- **English Language Learners (ELLs)**

The formula does not reflect the current costs of educating students who are learning a new language or the breadth of student needs in the ELL population. Updating the ELL index to better reflect the actual costs and needs of students in this population is desperately needed.

- **Students with Disabilities (SWDs)**

The cost of special education and the number of students being identified have risen tremendously over the past two decades. Plus, providing for the inconsistent costs for students with very different needs is critical to ensuring that one out-of-district placement is not devastating to the general education budget.

### **Property Tax Levy Cap Changes Local Contribution**

The current local contribution expectation is based on property wealth and income that determines the community’s “ability to pay” relative to other communities in New York State. In communities where property wealth has grown significantly faster than income wealth, such as in the suburbs of New York City, the “paper wealth” of houses with higher values due to scarcity is of little use in paying high levels of property taxes, which must be paid from annual income. It makes sense to incorporate the property tax levy cap limitation into the Foundation Aid formula.

Thank you for your consideration of the recommendations of our public school district as we work to educate students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century while balancing the needs of our community.

Respectfully submitted,

Chrissie Onofrio

Port Chester Board of Education President