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NEW YORK, NY 10027

September 4, 2024

Re: Written Comments for Foundation Aid Study

To Whom It May Concern at the Rockefeller Institute:

I am the parent of a child who was educated in New York City public schools from kindergarten through high school, and have lived in Manhattan for over 30 years. I have also been teaching in New York City high schools since 2003.

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 testimony will mainly be based on my experience working in schools, as that is where I have learned the most about the needs of students.

In the Title I schools where I have taught, the majority of students are from low-income Black and Brown communities. Many of our students have learning disabilities, a number of them are English language learners, and several of them are unhoused. Students often live in areas where violence is common, gunshots are heard, and they know someone who has been involved in the criminal justice system.

Given all that, the students in the school where I have taught since 2010 are almost all working hard for a better future. They visit teachers during lunch and after school to get academic support. Many join sports teams and clubs to gain additional experiences. The school provides a lot of support in every grade to help students apply to and get accepted to college.

An area where more money could make a positive difference is funding for those extra supports and activities that are so crucial to students' academic and personal growth. Teachers often do not get paid for all the hours they spend tutoring students and advising clubs, both during and after school hours. Students and teachers spend months trying to fund a single trip. We have limited arts offerings, with theater and music offered only after school. I have witnessed how schools with lower-income student populations are unable to offer all the trips and activities that are funded by parent groups in schools with a wealthier student body.

An equitable public education is critical to the growth of our society. Everyone benefits when adults are equipped with strong math and literacy skills, the ability to think critically and ask questions, and a broad and deep understanding of the world in which we live.

Public schools also help societies function by giving students a chance to interact with people of different backgrounds and abilities. We sent our son to public schools, and I have been grateful that public schools allowed my child to meet and befriend students who had very different backgrounds from our own.

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.

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.

Regards,

/s/

Valerie Wald
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