



Rockefeller Hearing on New York State's Foundation Aid Formula

July 16, 2024

Testimony of the Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am here representing the Dignity in Schools Campaign NY, a coalition of over 20 New York City-based organizations consisting of students, parents, educators and advocates who work to create a system of school discipline and safety based on mutual respect and problem-solving and to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

We want the state to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula so our most marginalized students, including BIPOC youth, immigrants, low-income youth, and students with disabilities can have the programs they need to succeed academically and also have access to meaningful Restorative Justice and mental health programs that keep them safe and engaged.

Public schools serve children of all abilities and identities and turn away no one. Funding our public schools adequately and equitably is essential to meet the diverse needs of students and to ensure their success and our shared prosperity. Therefore, our elected officials cannot ignore that our schools are becoming more diverse, including the fact that over the last couple of years, around 40,000 newly arrived students in temporary housing have enrolled in NYC. However, students in temporary housing and newcomer immigrants are not the only sources of our growing diversity. For example, during the 2022-23 school year:

- More than one in five NYC students (20.9%) had a disability (219,000 students).
- 14.1% of NYC students (roughly 148,000) were English Language Learners (ELLs). Of NYC's ELLs, more than 8,100 were Students with Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). 70% of all SIFE in New York State were in NYC.
- 72.8% of NYC students were from low-income families, meaning they qualified for free/reduced-price lunch or were eligible for Human Resources Administration (HRA) benefits (762,520 students). Statewide, 58.1% of students were economically disadvantaged.
- More than 119,000 NYC students—roughly one in nine (11.4%)—experienced homelessness. Of those students, 40,840 spent time living in City shelters. 88% of all students in shelter in NYS were in NYC.
- 6,800 NYC students spent time in foster care.



The City needs to rely on a Foundation Aid formula that addresses the growing needs of our public schools, including their socio-emotional needs. School should be a place where young people feel safe, try new things, and learn. But currently, many New York City schools are extremely underfunded and cultivate punitive environments where students don't always feel safe. This trend is particularly harmful in schools serving Black, Brown, and other marginalized young people who are targeted most harshly by school police. Underfunding our school communities creates barriers to learning and violates the safety and well-being of students, who in New York State have a right to a sound, basic education.

Far too many students are consistently deprived of resources and opportunities due to divestments, and are met with policing responses instead of holistic programming and mental health supports. NYS has an opportunity to be a leader in the U.S. by fully investing in education and prioritizing practices that support young people.

Therefore, we demand fully funded school programs and real safety. Our recommendations include:

- We are calling on the state to update the Foundation Aid formula to reflect the real cost of educating students today so that every public school has the resources to support all students.
- We want the state to fully fund Foundation Aid so our schools can meaningfully invest in Restorative Justice and mental health in schools. A commitment to restorative justice requires a commitment to public education and a meaningful culture shift that makes it possible to build community safety and respond to harm when it occurs.
- Updates to the formula should cover the costs of providing a high-quality education to all students and should center BIPOC students, immigrant newcomers, students with disabilities, students in foster care, students in temporary housing (unhoused), and LGBTQIA+ - who need trauma-informed practices and quality programming to succeed. As a result, the formula should add weights for students in temporary housing and other high-risk categories not yet captured, such as SIFE students.

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.

Fully fund public schools to ensure all our youth can access the high-quality and holistic programming they need to succeed.



Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Andrea Ortiz
Membership and Campaign Director
Dignity in Schools Campaign - NY