



## Chenango Forks Central School District

1 Gordon Drive, Binghamton, NY 13901

Ph: 607-648-7543 | Fax 607-648-7560

Thomas Burkhardt, *Superintendent of Schools*

Lori Pourby, *Assistant Superintendent of Schools*

September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Greeting Members of the Rockefeller Institute,

My name is Tom Burkhardt, and I am the proud Superintendent of Schools for the Chenango Forks Central School District. I am starting my 4<sup>th</sup> year at CF but have taught at every level of education in my 24 years of experience. Our district lies in the suburbs on the north side of Binghamton, NY. I also have four school age children that attend neighboring Susquehanna Valley School District which lies in a very similar district, both geographic and demographically speaking. My wife is a 21-year veteran teacher and serves as a member on the SV school board.

As experienced and passionate educators we believe that education is the cornerstone of our democracy and the one pure opportunity for all students to pursue the American Dream. Education is the foundation of what makes this country a leader in the global economy and leaders in treating all humans with dignity and respect. New York schools have worked tirelessly to overcome challenges of deepening inequalities and level the playing field to give all children the opportunity to be a successful contributor to our world. That is why we believe that funding public education is essential for the future success of New York State and our country.

In my roles as a parent, teacher, and as an administrator I have experienced the effects of underfunded schools. My children, students and staff have endured the loss of programs, supports for students in need, and staff who have lost their jobs due to inadequate and unstable foundation aid for schools.

At Chenango Forks, we consider ourselves a middle-class district that, as many districts in upstate New York, have experienced a loss in population while also seeing a significant rise in families who are in poverty and increase in students who need special services. The lack of community supports, and unfunded mandates have made our district the epicenter of programs and supports for our community. While we have seen a decrease in student population, the cost of supporting the students that remain has risen greatly. Currently, our students with disabilities have stayed consistent from 2010 at 14.5%, by implementing a comprehensive Response to Intervention program to address gaps in learning and divert them from the need of a classification. We currently have 210 students with special education needs and employ 22 various special education providers to service them. The costs of these services have also grown dramatically. The cost to educate a special education student has gone up 86% from 2010 for our district. In addition, the increase in minimum wage costs for the district to employ the required aides to service our students has been a significant hardship on the district.



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All these aforementioned factors have created significant challenges for our district, yet with a dedicated staff and community that has been focused on measurable improvement, we have shown significant growth in my time as superintendent. However, in the past two fiscal cycles for the district, Forks has lost over \$2,400,000 in building and foundation aid or 14.5% of our total spendable revenue. Last year's unprecedented and unforeseen shift in funding for schools has forced us to abruptly reduce staff and reduce programming. As a result of the past two years of budget cuts, in a district of approximately 1285 students and 200 staff, CF has reduced 18 staff members and we have had to eliminate or reduce the following:

- Eliminated business education department
- Eliminated Aide supports in Pre-K and K students
- Reduced AP and work-based course offerings for high school students
- Reduced direct reading instruction in the middle school
- Reduced elementary classroom teachers resulting in an average of 24 students per intermediate classes.

These changes and the uncertainty of funding moving forward has made it increasingly difficult for our district to attract quality certified staff for the few positions we have needed to hire during this time.

I would like to thank your organization for taking on the daunting task of analyzing the method for ensuring that the fundamental educational needs for all our children are met. As a school administrator who has dealt directly with various districts and their budgets over my past 16 years, I'd like to offer the following suggestions:

- Consider the increased total cost of educating students and especially students with special needs or ELL students
- Consider the income of families who are sending students to school not the wealth of the region as a whole
- Consider the cost of unfunded mandates
- Utilize other means of reporting to determine family incomes- presently reliant on self-reporting
- Allow districts 6% unrestricted reserves

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Burkhardt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas Burkhardt, Superintendent