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SENATOR BILL WEBER
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RANKING MINORITY MEMBER

BUDGET AND REVENUE
DISABILITIES

COMMITTEES

CONSUMER PROTECTION
CORPORATIONS, AUTHORITIES AND COMMISSIONS
EDUCATION

September 5, 2024

Rockefeller Institute of Government
441 State Street
Albany, NY 12203

To Whom It May Concern:

It was disappointing that the Rockefeller Foundation chose to ignore the Hudson Valley in general, and Rockland County specifically, when it scheduled the five public hearings around the state on Foundation Aid. Someone will need to explain to me why our children – and our diverse communities – don't merit more attention.

In your absence, I hosted my own bipartisan public hearing on Monday, July 29th at Rockland Community College. The event was attended by members of the State Assembly, our congressman, and Superintendents from various school districts, as well members of local school boards, parents, and other concerned citizens.

While there was spirited discussion on several topics, there was zero disagreement on one thing: The current Foundation Aid Formula is a mess and needs to be fixed.

I also have a few specific comments:

One, how is it possible that New York's school funding formula bases student poverty rates in each school district on data from the 2000 US Census and labor costs from 2007?

I can't think of anything in 2024 that costs what it did in 2007, and the 2000 Census was three Censuses ago. It is well past time for an update that both modernizes the formula and requires use of the recent data and statistics available to accurately fund our schools.

Two, the Regional Cost Index needs to be addressed and reformed. That's why one of the first bills I filed after being elected to the New York State Senate, S.5534, does exactly that.

Moreover, others who participated with me wanted their opinions shared with you and I have included them below:

"I believe that a comprehensive Foundation Aid study must examine the Regional Cost Index for the Lower Hudson Valley and recognize the cost to live in this area. The new formula must incorporate the latest school district enrollment data and account for changes over time. Moreover, the new formula must also include provisions for special education expenditures and the implications of the Tax Cap. Essentially, for this study to be valuable in addressing school districts' needs, it may be best to begin with

a clean slate and establish a new formula.” - Marc P. Baiocco, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools,
Clarkstown Central School District

“The blame game is destructive! The blame game doesn’t solve any problems. The blame game punishes the public-school children. It’s time to drop the baseless accusations and come together for meaningful changes that address and fix the real problems! The NY State funding formula ignores private school population, in districts with a large parentally placed students population, the district’s public schools, are underfunded. Those districts are left with inadequate funds to maintain their facilities and programs. We must deal with the source of the problem – the state’s formula for school district allocation. Only a restructuring of the Foundation aid formula that considers the entire student population – both public and private – will solve the problems of the district.” - Rabbi Shragi Greenbaum, Rockland County Regional Office Director, Agudath Israel of America

“As a member of the Superintendent’s Community Circle for almost 10 years since it was created and as a member of the Community Advisory Board for several years since it was created, I have been advocating for the resources our district needs on behalf of ALL our children for many years. We have an extremely unique district with 44,000 children. Over 76% are non-public school students and almost 24% (10,500) are public school students. We all know the multiple reasons why this broken outdated foundation aid formula does not work for most districts throughout the state. However, due to our uniqueness, including the number of English language learners, the significant number of low-income children, etc. all of these factors create a more challenging environment which the new state aid formula will need to take into account. We hope that our children will no longer be invisible, and that our voices will finally be heard. We look forward to an inclusive updated foundation aid formula that will truly help all the children in the ERCSD and throughout New York State.” - Rivkie Feiner, East Ramapo Central School District Superintendent’s Community Circle member and local community activist

“We are recommending the following: Update school data in the foundation aid formula to ensure that increasing student needs, changes in enrollment, recent poverty data, appropriate regional costs, and special education needs are reflected. Establish a mechanism to regularly re-evaluate and update the formula to reflect nuanced poverty measures, the true cost of educating ENL and special needs students, accurate regional cost indices, and the effect of the tax levy cap on the community portion of school funding. Amend the regional cost index of the lower Hudson Valley to reflect the high cost of operating in the suburbs of NYC. Maintain a full funding of the current foundation aid formula with annual increase to recognize the ongoing inflationary costs that districts incur and commit to fully funding an updated formula focused on the current needs of our state.” - Deborah P. Gatti, President, Rockland County School Boards Association

I trust you will consider these opinions seriously and join us in taking action to improve our schools and ensure our students, parents, and taxpayers are treated with the respect they deserve as citizens of our state. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Senator Bill Weber