

Genesee Valley Chief School Officers' Association

LeRoy, New York 14482

September 5, 2024

Rockefeller Institute of Government
411 State Street
Albany, NY 12203

Dear Esteemed Members of the Rockefeller Institute:

The Foundation Aid Formula was established with the noble intention of ensuring that every child in New York receives a sound basic education, regardless of their zip code or socioeconomic status. However, over the years, it has become clear that this formula is in dire need of revision to fulfill its intended purpose effectively. The current formula fails to adequately account for the diverse needs of students across the state, resulting in disparities in funding that perpetuate inequality in education. Schools in low-income communities, where resources are already scarce, bear the brunt of this inequity, depriving countless children of the opportunities they deserve to thrive academically and beyond.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the glaring inadequacies of the current funding system. Schools faced unprecedented challenges in adapting to remote learning, exacerbating existing disparities and widening the opportunity gap. As we strive to recover from the pandemic and build a more resilient education system, it is imperative that we address the systemic flaws in the Foundation Aid Formula.

The study used to derive the Foundation Amount is obsolete. There have been significant changes in standards, assessments, and regulations. The Board of Regents is considering new graduation measures that will redefine successful schools. Whether by statutes, regulations, or community expectations, the responsibilities placed on schools to raise students have increased exponentially. Schools are now providing:

- Transportation for apathetic students to school
- Multiple meals and snacks
- Increased special education services and related supports
- Increased interventions and supports for our earliest learners
- Additional mental health services
- Assistance with hygiene, clothing, and housing needs
- Instruction in restorative practices
- Additional language acquisition instruction
- Additional opportunities to keep students engaged in healthy after school programming
- 24-hour, 7 day-a-week responses to anonymous reporting systems for students in crisis
- School safety and security personnel
- Assisting local social service agencies with students in need

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These are just a fraction of the responsibilities placed upon our schools. Please know, the aforementioned are just to get our students to a baseline where they can learn the required content per the regulations of our Commissioner of Education. Rural schools are expected to offer community schools services without community schools funding. There must be a thorough study of what it costs to educate children in today's New York.

Using antiquated data to calculate pupil needs does not provide a true representation of the families we serve. Employing free and reduced price lunch percentages is increasingly problematic given the number of districts qualifying for the community eligibility provision. Classification rates in the Genesee Valley BOCES have increased by an average of 19% since the formula's inception. This trend poses significant challenges given the lack of regional placements for students with significant needs. The last resort for any district is to place a child on home instruction while waiting for an appropriate placement. The amount of time students are in these temporary placements have increased due to diminished resources. This results in costly hearings that further exacerbate. The weighting of English as a new language (ENL) students must increase given expansion of the subpopulation, and those arriving with interrupted formal education. The ENL population in the Genesee Valley BOCES region has increased by an average of 363% since 2007.

Regional cost indices have not been updated since the formula was enacted. Rural districts spend more to gain access to services for students given they are not readily available in their districts, counties, or regions. One of the districts in our region is currently sending a student to a residential program in Massachusetts because it is the most appropriate placement. Scarcity consumes additional resources making it more difficult to attract and retain highly-qualified talent. The impacts of aid stagnation are magnified in our communities.

There must be recognition the property tax cap did not exist at the formula's inception when evaluating expected local contributions. Arbitrary floors in calculations provide inaccurate information on communities' abilities to generate local revenue. Computations using the Combined Wealth Ratio must be replaced with the lesser of the Pupil Wealth Ratio or Alternate Pupil Wealth Ratio to accurately reflect fiscal capacities.

Any solution for education funding must have a sensible timeline for implementation and run as designed. Legislating 'course corrections' (e.g. Gap Elimination Adjustment, Adjustment to Inflation Calculation) mid-stream increases rancor and capriciousness. Districts must have the capacity to plan years in advance.

Investing in education is one of the most effective ways to promote social mobility, drive economic growth, and strengthen our communities. By closing the opportunity gap and empowering all students to reach their full potential, we can build a brighter future for New York State. Schools in the Finger Lakes region generate a total of 56,323 jobs. 30,115 are directly employed through the school districts and 26,208 others are employed by spillover effects of school spending. Schools produce \$3,107.7 million in income for the region. This generates \$152 million in income tax to New York State and \$78.5 million in sales tax to the state and counties in the region.

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Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to your leadership and collaboration in advancing this important cause.

Respectfully,



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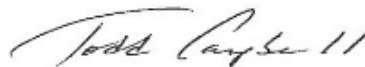
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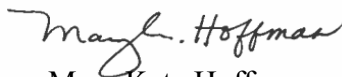
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