

My name is Martina Meijer. I am an educator, community member, and education advocate from Brooklyn, NY. I have taught in NYCDOE schools for 13 years. It remains the most segregated school district in the country, and for that reason alone the Foundation Aid formula should be reformulated.

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.

The school I work in is the most diverse public school I have ever been to. We are a Title I school, and we serve families from around the world as well as multiple generations who have attended the same school. We now have many new arrivals who are staying in a shelter down the street. Teachers and families have opened their homes, pantries, closets, and wallets to support the needs of the community, but it is not enough. After 60 days, the students are thrown out of the shelter. It has caused chaos and transience, which clearly impact the students and their education. They need more support, emotional and otherwise. Their families need support. We do not have counselors who speak Spanish, and we are not able to find enough paraprofessionals to meet the needs of our students. Many of the paras in our school are sub paras, which are more costly to the school— we need our paras to have a living wage in this extremely expensive city. The median rent in Brooklyn is \$4,100. How can someone afford that on a \$30,000 annual salary?

Our school is a warm, loving place where children and their voices matter. We have an arts program that includes music, visual arts, dance, and theater classes. We have a growing Dual Language program and low teacher turnover. We have a monthly greenmarket, a farming program, and community composting.

The cuts to our funding have impacted staffing and increased class sizes. I teach a class that should be capped at 24 starting in 2028, and this year I have 28 students, and next year I will have 30 students. We are not able to hire the staff we need because of the funding formula and how the money individually follows the students. If even one child requires a specific support or setting, it should trigger a budget item to provide the funding for that person to be hired— a need expressed should be met. Instead, a single student with a specific support need only comes with a fraction of the funding to fully hire a support person, so schools are either left scrambling to hire part time and piece-meal, or are perpetually out of compliance and unable to meet a child's needs, which impacts that child as well as their entire class.

With these large class sizes, students don't get the individual attention and support they need, family conferences are abbreviated, and teachers are more burnt out. It takes me much longer to prepare report cards for 30 children than it would for 24 children.

Last year, in a class of 25, I had a student who was not in the right setting and did not receive the support they needed. At least 80% of my time and energy went to supporting that child through the day. I almost quit my job. I failed to support the rest of the class because this child needed so much support and emotional regulation. We did not have a counselor who could communicate with this child, because our counselors only speak English. Our administration could not communicate with the child's mother without a phone translator. We were not able to

meet the child's or family's needs due to our school's tight budget (after multiple rounds of cuts). We had families that moved away during the pandemic.

Money is wasted on corporate scripted curricula that have multiple workbooks and products to purchase yearly. NYCDOE has hundreds of Central office employees with curriculum development in their job descriptions, and yet we are spending tens of millions of dollars on outside contracts. The mismanagement of funds through mayoral control and the hyperfocus on increasing test scores has hurt students who are far below grade level and students with disabilities (they are never chosen for after school or Saturday academic intervention because schools tend to focus on moving the level 2s to level 3s). Teachers still have to support these students. We should have enough funding to provide intensive intervention for every student that needs it, and students should not be struggling year after year.

None of the schools I have ever worked in has had a librarian on staff, despite a state law mandating that every school have one. Schools should have adequate funding to have librarians.

The state of education in NYC today requires educators, parents, and community members to take up education activism as a full time job outside of our regular full time jobs. We are fighting annual cuts to early childhood and K-12 programs. We have taken the mayor to court over the funding multiple times. It is exhausting to have to constantly battle for funding for a system that continuously fails to adequately serve its mostly Black and Brown students. It is not rocket science— we need to invest in our future. The continual failure to do so feels deliberate.

We have many students who missed years of education (SIFE students) while traveling to this country. They are not receiving the academic support they need, nor the emotional support. All of our students, in all of our schools, deserve their needs to be met. That is the promise of public education. Foundation Aid needs to be formulated to address the decades of underfunding that the NYCDOE has experienced. We are seeing teacher and para attrition, and the future of our city depends on us repairing past harms and facilitating personal and academic growth. We cannot achieve this without adequate funding. It's well past time.

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.

Signed,  
Martina Meijer  
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