



Testimony of the New York State Network for Youth Success Before the
Rockefeller Institute on Foundation Aid and Public School Financing
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Trudy Morgan Tetteh

Policy Director

New York State Network for Youth Success

Trudy@NetworkForYouthSuccess.org / 518-694-0660 ext. 5

We thank the Rockefeller Institute and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for the opportunity to present testimony today regarding Foundation Aid and Public School Financing.

The New York State Network for Youth Success (The Network) is a statewide nonprofit designed to strengthen the commitment and capacity of communities, programs, and professionals to increase access to high-quality programs and services beyond the traditional classroom. The Network wants all of New York's children and youth to have access to high-quality afterschool, summer and other expanded learning opportunities that will support their success in school, college, work, and life.

In any year, all of New York's students should be provided with equitable access to a well-rounded education. The Foundation Aid formula is a critical tool to help meet student needs but has not quite yet fulfilled the purpose due to significant shifts in educational needs. The pandemic brought into focus what we already know - that schools look different today and therefore their supports should be revised to meet school needs.

Today, student demographics and enrollment, poverty rates across the state, and educational practices look different than they did years ago. At the peak of the pandemic, it became apparent that there was a need for more avenues for young people to learn, more educators, and more resources beyond the traditional classroom. It is therefore critical that the State builds a stronger, fairer education system that helps every student thrive. As the State considers changes to the Foundation Aid formula, it must ensure that the formula is grounded in the core principles of a "good funding" formula – to provide adequate resources that ensure equitable access to a sound and basic education for New York students. We provide the following recommendations to help meet this goal:

Explore alternative methodology to determine the base cost for the Foundation Aid formula.

The Successful School District (SSD) cost model approach fails to adequately reflect present changes that impact schools' ability to provide a sound, basic education for at least two reasons:

- Though Foundation Aid law requires the State to update the list of “successful” districts every three years to update the methodology for SSD approach, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) has not updated the list of successful districts at least in the last seven years.
- The SSD approach does not account for changing state learning standards and assessments.

It is imperative that the base rate considers the crucial supports – not only those directly related to instruction – to address barriers to students’ learning and success.

Reexamine and revise weights applied to the Pupils Need Index and the Weighted Pupil Count in Foundation Aid formula.

Not all students have the same needs and that is why establishing an equitable basis as one of the critical factors for a good funding formula is paramount. The diversity of student needs must not only be acknowledged but reflected accurately in the Foundation Aid formula. This requires utilizing an accurate estimate of current data to determine additional costs related to educating ALL students, including those that need extra support.

- Introduce additional weights for students experiencing homelessness and/or in temporary housing.
- Increase the per pupil weight for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) to adequately provide support and services to meet their needs.
- Increase weight for students with disabilities to help school districts meet their legal obligation to adequately provide services to meet their needs.

Update alternative poverty measures to inform the Pupil Need Index.

The poverty weight built into the foundation aid formula inadequately reflects the current number of students living in poverty, and it fails to address the unique educational needs of students who belong to multiple at-risk groups.

Account for, and fund comprehensive supports like afterschool and community schools as crucial to a well-rounded education.

Traditional classroom lessons are not the only avenues for students to learn effectively. A well-rounded education includes supports that ensures students come to school and are ready to learn, and it includes providing important services such as afterschool and summer programs, health and mental health services, and family engagement opportunities. It is key to integrate costs associated with these supports in providing education aid to schools. For instance, afterschool, summer learning, and other expanded learning opportunities are an essential part of our education system helping to provide more time for deeper learning, creative spaces for hands-on projects, and opportunities that help students discover the interests and talents that lead to success in the classroom, careers, and beyond.

The integration of these supports is maximized through the community schools strategy. Support for the strategy is provided as part of a Foundation Aid set-aside, offering many schools the opportunities to leverage this strategy should they choose to. We elevate the need to fund

community schools as a categorical aid or unrestricted aid, ensuring the State provides at least \$250 million to match the current Community Schools Aid set-aside should it be discontinued, and maintains support for districts effectively using the set-aside funds for community schools. A categorical community schools funding would allow school districts, BOCES, and community partners committed to this strategy to target and maximize resources toward specific activities and interventions that best align with community schools' principles and implementation. Also, it would provide crucial investment to support those school districts that do not have a Community Schools Set-Aside as part of their school aid, and/or those that need further support utilizing the community schools strategy.

We appreciate the State's continuous efforts to gather feedback on possible revisions to the Foundation Aid formula and are hopeful that these efforts will positively impact education for students, families, and communities across New York.