



New York State + Rockefeller Institute
Testimony on Foundation Aid and Public School Financing
Submitted Testimony prepared by Dante Bravo, Senior Policy Analyst

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My name is Dante Bravo and on behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank the Rockefeller Institute as well as the New York State Education Department for the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue of foundation aid, school funding formulas, and their impact on New York state's youth and families.

For nearly 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no limits to a young person's aspirations. We have constructed a continuum of services for young people that fosters well-being and allows them to succeed and thrive in every milestone of life. Today, our 2,000 full- and part-time staff members empower nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families through our network of 40 locations including early childhood education centers, public schools, community centers, NYCHA facilities, and community health clinics in four New York City neighborhoods – Harlem, Washington Heights, the South Bronx, and the north shore of Staten Island.

Children's Aid submits this written testimony to highlight how critical foundation aid funding and school funding formula policies are to the communities we serve. According to the New York City Public School system (NYCPS), the state sends \$9.9 Billion each year to the City to educate its youth. This is approximately 25% of NYCPS' budget, and the foundation aid formula per pupil makes up the majority of these state dollars. The fact is our young people need *more* resources, even with this historic investment. In the 2001–2002 school year, New York City and New York State contributed roughly equal amounts to the NYCPS budget. In fiscal year 2025, New York City will shoulder 57% of the cost of educating the roughly one million public school students in the five boroughs, while State funding covers 37% of NYCPS' budget.

Thanks to the increase in foundation aid in Fiscal Year 2024, NYCPS patched over gaps left from expiring Federal stimulus funds including programs that provide whole child, wraparound supports; school administration budgets; and infrastructure improvements to school buildings across New York City. As an organization invested in the well-being of young people in New York City and beyond, we cannot stress how important it is to adequately and equitably fund NYCPS. **Despite recent gains, the current foundation aid amount is not sufficient to cover the true cost of public schools.**

Children's Aid appreciates the significant strides the State government has taken to funnel more resources to our children, however, to truly fulfill that promise of a high quality education and maintain New York state's status as a leader in the education field, we recommend the following:

- **The foundation aid formula must be updated to reflect *the true cost* of educating young people in the 2020s and beyond.** The amount of state aid truly owed to New York State's students was not actually paid in full until 2023-24. We applaud this administration for finally bringing the state into compliance with its 2007 school funding commitment, but this year's budget did not account for the full inflation in costs faced by school districts, using the 17 year old foundation aid formula. In addition to not being adjusted for inflation, the outdated formula does not account for different student demographics, education needs, new technologies, education policy changes, and post-pandemic learning. New York remains one of the most expensive metropolitan areas in the world, and our youth deserve a formula that can keep up with the changing times.
- **Reexamine the outdated "successful school district model" that has formed the base of the formula.** This model has not been updated in seven years; is based on a narrow and outdated view of academic proficiency that defines a successful school district; and is not representative of the needs of large urban districts.
- **The State must reexamine the poverty weight in the foundation aid formula to ensure the needs of students are accurately represented.** The poverty weight currently baked into the foundation aid formula is not sufficient to accurately count the current number of students in poverty, let alone to describe the distinct educational needs of youth who fall into multiple populations of need.
- **Add a per-pupil weight for students in temporary housing and students in the foster system.** More than 119,000 New York City students—roughly one in every nine—experienced homelessness in 2022–23 (the most recent year for which data are available), and 6,800 students spent time in the foster system. In Fiscal Year 2024, Children's Aid in particular served 921 youth in foster care who have specific needs (educational, medical, socioemotional and more) that require additional support, and the State has a responsibility to ensure these youth can thrive in their local schools.
- **Increase the weights for students with disabilities and multilingual learners** to ensure they reflect the cost of providing legally required, high-quality classes, services, and supports and are adequate to address the wide spectrum of student needs. This includes considering differentiated weights by program to better account for the tremendous diversity within both groups of students, neither of which is a monolith.
- **Provide resources to implement the State's new class size requirements.** The New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) has estimated that NYCPS will need between \$1.6 and \$1.9 billion annually to achieve full compliance with the law by the 2028 deadline, given the significant hiring needs associated with reducing class size yet the State has allocated no additional funding to help NYCPS meet this legislative mandate, which applies to New York City alone.
- **Include funding for students in 3-K and Pre-K, as well as students with disabilities through the school year they turn 22.** Over the past decade, New York City has dramatically expanded access to early childhood education. The foundation aid formula, however, only covers grades K–12, a holdover from an earlier era in which a child's educational career was typically thought



to begin at age five or six. Numerous studies have demonstrated the long-term benefits of high-quality preschool, and the foundation aid formula should be updated to reflect the needs of a unified P–12 system. In addition, the State recently affirmed that districts have a legal obligation to provide special education programs and services to students with disabilities until they turn 22 if they have not yet graduated, but the foundation aid formula does not yet provide funding for these students.

- **Prioritize the needs of students, not just the bottom line.** The legislation that authorized the Rockefeller Institute’s study of the formula establishes that the “foundation aid formula, as modified by the recommendations of the study, shall ‘be fiscally sustainable’”. We urge the state to instead follow the mandate laid out by the Court of Appeals in *CFE v. State of New York*, which requires the State to provide an opportunity for a sound basic education to all students and to ensure sufficient funding to fairly do that. Student needs must be prioritized.

Additionally, we recommend providing opportunities for community engagement as Rockefeller institute engages in this research. This means:

- Opportunities for virtual engagement
- Translation services available at each engagement
- Grassroots outreach to multiple communities impacted by any shift in the foundation aid formula
- More opportunities to share feedback aside from submitting testimony.

Children’s Aid is a member of the Campaign for Children, the New York State Network for Youth Success, the New York State Community Schools Network, the Empire State Campaign for Child Care, and the New York City Coalition for Community School Excellence; and as a member of these networks and alliances we are in support of their recommendations to the Rockefeller Institute as well.

Children’s Aid also hopes to be a thought partner to our colleagues in New York State government as they wrestle with these complex issues and determine how to ensure that every child in New York receives the education they deserve. We especially want to encourage the State to think about schools as community hubs to offer wraparound, whole-child services and supports, from afterschool, to school-based health centers, to food pantries, to social-emotional learning.

Community Schools as a Vehicle for Sustainable School Funding

For over 30 years, Children’s Aid has operated community schools in partnership with NYCPS. The community schools strategy effectively builds on students’ strengths and removes the barriers to learning that can get in the way of youth success – academically, socially, and emotionally—and we believe this strategy is needed now more than ever, especially as New York State grapples with these questions of equity and sustainability within the foundation aid formula.

Community schools act as community hubs that offer holistic, integrated services that organize school, community voices and resources around student success and the needs of the whole child. At our



community schools, we work with the school community to coordinate and integrate expanded learning programs, comprehensive health services (physical, behavioral health, dental, and vision), and family engagement strategies into the fabric of the school. When thinking about sustainably funding New York State schools and supporting students for decades to come, community schools are a strategy that leverages public dollars and makes them go further, as well as a strategy for equity and student success.

Currently, Children's Aid partners with 20 community schools in New York City. Children's Aid community schools provide programs and services across four domains: academic, social-emotional, health and wellness, and family and home. These programs and services include afterschool programming, targeted academic interventions, attendance support, school-based health clinics with medical, dental, and vision services, behavioral health services and counseling, parent workshops, family events, and many others. Children's Aid as the lead partner coordinates the programs and school strategy at the school level; advocates for the students' and school's needs; brings in additional resources, programs, and services; conducts needs assessments and supports data-driven decision making; and has a full-time presence in the school. Children's Aid provides every one of our schools with a full-time Community School Director to coordinate with school leadership and ensure resources, programming, and services are integrated, both during the school day and during expanded learning time.

In the school year 2022-2023, 16 out of our 20 community schools saw improvements in chronic absence last year, despite the current high rates of chronic absenteeism across the city, state, and nation. Over 93% of students at our high schools who applied to college were accepted, and 100% of Spring 2023 graduates at our high schools completed a post-secondary plan.

Community schools represent a long-term resource coordination strategy to sustainably invest in youth, families, and communities. Furthermore, research shows that community schools are a smart investment in the coordination of resources at both the school and system levels. One study found a return on investment (ROI) [of over \\$7 for every \\$1](#) invested in a community school director's salary. In NYC, UFT's United Community Schools data showed that a \$100,000 investment to hire a community school director can bring in more than \$600,000 in services and grants to the school community. The Rome Connected Community Schools program in upstate NY reported an ROI upward [of \\$20 for every \\$1](#) invested in community school initiatives.

We state these successes and returns on investment to reiterate the need for New York State to sustainably invest in community schools as a whole-child strategy that allows for long term investments to grow into measurable outcomes for children and youth, regardless of their backgrounds. The community schools strategy can help New York State meet the needs of students into the future.

To ensure the sustained, whole-child education of students all across New York State, we must invest, and truly champion community schools. Support for the strategy is currently provided as part of a foundation aid set-aside, offering many schools the opportunity to leverage this strategy should they choose to. We elevate the need to fund community schools as categorical or unrestricted aid, ensuring



the State provides at least \$250 million to match the current Community Schools set-aside should it be discontinued, and maintain support for districts effectively using the set-aside funds for community schools. A categorical community schools funding stream would allow school districts, BOCES, and community-based organizations committed to this strategy to target and maximize resources toward specific activities and interventions with fidelity to the community schools' model. 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 hope this testimony can be the beginning of a larger conversation that ensures that all New York State schools can be places of excellence for their local communities. We hope that the New York State Education Department, the Rockefeller Institute, and other stakeholders look to Children's Aid, NYCPS, the New York State Community Schools Network, and all of our partners in the Community Schools space for our experience in coordinating, executing and sustaining whole child supports, as well as supporting young people in foster care and other youth with distinct, unique needs.

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the New York State Government for the opportunity to submit written testimony, and we look forward to our continued partnership. Please feel free to contact me at dbravo@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.