



Demario A. Strickland
Interim Superintendent
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To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the critical issue of Foundation Aid and its impact on the Rochester City School District (RCSD). This testimony provides insights and recommendations based on our District's experiences and needs.

The Foundation Aid formula was first enacted in 2007, following New York's highest court ruling in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State lawsuit, which declared the State's school finance system unconstitutional. The lawsuit, initiated by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) in 1993, argued that New York City public schools did not provide students with a "sound basic education" as mandated by the State Constitution due to inadequate funding. The State's remedy included a commitment to increase school aid over four years by \$7 billion annually, with \$3.2 billion designated for New York City. It established a distribution model to factor in local fiscal capacity and target funds to the most needy school districts.

Despite the commitment, the four-year phase-in was abandoned, and full funding was realized in the 2023-2024 school year. The Foundation Aid formula targets State Aid to high-need districts via the Pupil Needs Index (PNI), accounting for relative poverty of students, community poverty, the number of English language learners, students with special needs, and population sparsity. However, the community poverty data embedded in the formula, captured from the 2000 census, must be updated and accurately account for population shifts.

RCSD, like many other high-need districts, faced significant fiscal capacity issues even before the pandemic, which have only been exacerbated. The outdated data used in the Foundation Aid formula needs to reflect our student population's current needs and demographics. Consequently, we need help to provide the quality education our students deserve. The recent full funding is a step in the right direction, but more must be done. The following are several recommendations to ensure long-term adequacy and equity.

Amend the Foundation Aid Formula: The State must devote adequate time and resources to amend the existing formula. The new system should respond dynamically to the diverse needs of student populations. This includes updating the community poverty data to reflect current demographics and economic conditions.

Gradual Adjustments Starting in 2025-2026: We are pleased that the Rockefeller Institute recognizes the complexity of overhauling the formula. We urge the Institute to use the feedback and updated data to make minor adjustments in the 2025-2026 State Budget.



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These adjustments will help move us closer to a more equitable and adequate funding system.

Commitment to a Revised Formula: It is imperative that the State commits to a revised Foundation Aid formula that is transparent, predictable, and distributes funding equitably, reflecting unique student needs. This will ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to a quality education.

Local Control of Resource Allocation: The State must recognize that experienced educators at the local level are best suited to make resource allocation decisions. Therefore, we urge the State to eliminate Foundation Aid set-asides and allow school districts to target funding where it is most needed.

The Rochester City School District is dedicated to providing a sound basic education to all our students. However, achieving this goal requires a fair and equitable distribution of state resources. We urge the Legislature to immediately update and revise the Foundation Aid formula, ensuring that it meets the needs of today's students and communities. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and your ongoing support of public education in New York State.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Demario A. Strickland".

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