

Collective Call for an Equitable Foundation Aid Formula that Meets Students' Needs

SEPTEMBER 2024

Every child in New York State has the right to a sound, basic education—and providing such an education requires adequate and equitable funding. The creation of the Foundation Aid formula more than 15 years ago was an important step towards ensuring districts have the resources they require to meet the basic needs of their students. While we appreciate that the State began fully funding Foundation Aid in 2023, the formula itself includes outdated and incomplete measures of need and has not evolved to account for the growing cost of providing a high-quality education to all students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), students from low-income families, students experiencing homelessness, and others who need additional support.

Education in New York looks very different today than it did two decades ago. Districts across the State offer early childhood education to far more children, and the State recently directed districts to continue serving students with disabilities until they turn 22 years old if they have not yet graduated. The pandemic exacerbated academic and social-emotional challenges and disparities. As Governor Hochul has rightly noted, there is an ongoing youth mental health crisis. Student homelessness has increased dramatically over the past two decades, and, over the past couple of years, New York City schools have enrolled tens of thousands of recently arrived immigrant students in temporary housing.

Unfortunately, State funding for public education has not kept pace with these rising expenses and changing student needs. In the 2001–2002 school year, New York City and New York State contributed roughly equal amounts to the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) budget. Today, the City's share far exceeds that of the State: New York City shoulders 57% of the cost of educating the roughly one million public school students in the five boroughs, while State funding covers 37% of the NYCPS budget. More resources are needed from the State, especially in light of the growing needs mentioned above, as well as the recent expiration of federal stimulus funds and the requirements of the 2022 class size law.

The Foundation Aid formula must be updated to reflect the true cost of educating young people in the 2020s and beyond. As organizations working with students and families across New York City, we recommend that the State:

- **Replace the outdated “successful school district model” that has formed the base of the formula.** This model is based on the narrow view that successful school districts are those where students perform well on standardized tests, with insufficient consideration to the needs of large urban districts. The State must ensure the new base rate reflects the actual cost of providing the academic, social-emotional, and holistic supports students need to succeed in school, including in large urban districts, with particular attention to students from low-income backgrounds,

students with disabilities, English Language Learners, students who are homeless, and students in the foster system.

- **Reexamine the existing poverty weight to ensure the needs of students from low-income communities are accurately represented.** It is not sufficient to merely update Census data and the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; the State should explore alternative, more robust measures of poverty and economic disadvantage, including considering differentiated weights for different concentrations of poverty.
- **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. At present, the Foundation Aid formula does not provide any additional funding to help schools support these student populations, both of whom face tremendous obstacles to success in school and have educational needs distinct from those of all students in poverty.
- **Increase the weights for students with disabilities and ELLs 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.
- **Update the Regional Cost Index to better reflect the rising costs of salaries and services.** This metric has been fixed since 2006 and is thus significantly out of date, particularly given increased expenses in New York City.
- **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 provide funding for these students.

As State leaders consider changes to the Foundation Aid formula, they must ensure it reflects the actual cost of providing a sound basic education based on today’s students and schools and must have a clear focus on equity. We look forward to working with you to ensure that school districts have the resources they need to provide a high-quality education to *all* students, including those who need the most support.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Advocates for Children of New York

AHRC NYC

Alliance for Quality Education

Barrier Free Living

Black Lives Matter at NYC Schools

Block Institute School

Bronx Developmental Disabilities Council

Bushwick United Head Start

CAMBA, Inc.

Center for Independence of the Disabled,
New York

The Century Foundation (Pre-K–12
Education Team)

The Child Study Center of New York

Children’s Aid

Children’s Defense Fund-New York

Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)

The Circle Keepers

Citizens’ Committee for Children of New
York

City Year New York

Coalition for Asian American Children and
Families

The Coalition for Community Schools
Excellence

Coalition for the Homeless

The Collaborative for Inclusive Education

Committee for Hispanic Children & Families
(CHCF)

The Community-Based Education
Movement™

Community Inclusion & Development
Alliance (CIDA)

Community Resources Staten Island

Cooke School and Institute

Counseling In Schools, Inc.

Cypress Hills Local Development
Corporation

Day Care Council of New York

Dignity in Schools Campaign – NY

DreamYard Project, Inc.

DRUM-Desis Rising Up and Moving

Ece On the Move

Education Council Consortium

EdTrust-New York

Educators for Excellence – New York

El Puente

Expanded Schools

Faith in New York

Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project

Four Freedoms Democratic Club

FPWA

Global Kids

Goddard Riverside

Good Shepherd Services

Graham Windham

The Guild for Exceptional Children, Inc.

The Home for Little Wanderers, New York

Homeless Services United

ICCD

IntegrateNYC

InterAgency Council of Developmental
Disabilities Agencies, Inc.

JCCA

KAVI (Kings Against Violence Initiative)

Kennedy Children’s Center

Kingsbridge Heights Community Center

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Literacy Academy Collective
Little Meadows Early Childhood Center
Marie Pense Center
Metropolitan Parent Center, Sinergia Inc.
Moms United for Black Lives NYC
Mouse
Movement of Rank and File Members/
MORE UFT
New Alternatives for Children
New Settlement Parent Action Committee
New York Appleseed
New York Center for Child Development
New York Center for Interpersonal
Development-NYCID
New York Collective of Radical Educators
The New York Foundling
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest,
Inc. (NYLPI)
New York Performance Standards
Consortium
New York State Alliance for Children with
Special Needs
New York State Network for Youth Success
New Yorkers for Culture & Arts
Nuestros Ninos Child Development School
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable
NYC Coalition for Children with Special
Needs
NYU School of Law Education Advocacy
Clinic
Parents Supporting Parents NY
Partners for Dignity & Rights
Partnership with Children
PRESSNYC-Parents for Responsive Equitable
Safe Schools
Prospect Kids

QSAC, Inc.
Queens Centers for Progress
Restorative Justice Initiative
Safe Zone Cross Culture Youth Inc.
SCO Family of Services
Small Wonder Preschool, Inc.
South Asian Youth Action (SAYA)
Southeast Bronx Neighborhood Centers,
Inc.
St. Nicks Alliance
Stanley M Isaacs Neighborhood Center
Steppingstone Day School
Teachers Unite
Therapy and Learning Center
UJA-Federation of New York
United for Brownsville
United Neighborhood Houses
United Way of New York City
Volunteers of America-Greater New York
Volunteers of America-Greater New York
Bronx Early Learning Center
YMCA of Greater NY
Zone 126