

# WHITNEY POINT

## CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 249, 10 Keibel Rd. Whitney Point, NY 13862 P 607.692.8202 F 607.692.4434

**Jo-Ann Sexton**  
Superintendent of Schools

**Shannon Koehler**  
Assistant Superintendent

**Zachary M. Woodard**  
School Business Executive

To: The Rockefeller Institute of Government

From: Jo-Ann Sexton, Superintendent of Schools, Whitney Point School District

Date: August 29, 2024

RE: Foundation Aid Study

As Superintendent of the Whitney Point School District, I appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective on the critical role that Foundation Aid plays in our district's ability to provide a high-quality education to all students. Foundation Aid has been the cornerstone of our efforts to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

Public school districts across New York State are tasked with providing an excellent education to all students, regardless of the wealth of the area they serve. Whitney Point is a rural, high-poverty district that works tirelessly to prepare our graduates with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for their diverse post-secondary pursuits. To maximize the opportunities available to our students, we continually seek out additional resources through grants, partnerships with local agencies, and collaborations with area post-secondary institutions.

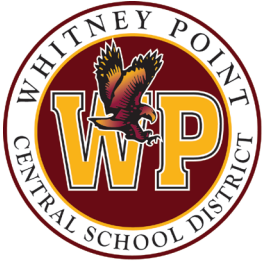
However, the cost of running our school district continues to rise. The increase in the minimum wage, along with necessary adjustments to honor the experience of longer-serving employees, has significantly impacted our wage budget. Additionally, to attract and retain staff in our rural district, we must offer competitive salaries comparable to those in suburban and urban districts. Health care costs for our employees have also become a substantial financial burden.

Our district generates only \$86,399 with a 1% increase in the local tax levy—a modest amount that underscores our heavy reliance on Foundation Aid to provide the equitable education that our students deserve.

In smaller districts like ours, even slight changes in student population can lead to significant reductions in aid if there is no hold-harmless protection in the formula. A small decrease in student numbers does not necessarily reduce the need for staff, yet funding can be dramatically cut, making it challenging to maintain essential services. It is crucial that school districts have a predictable and stable aid formula to responsibly plan budgets, ensure fiscal stability for our communities, and thoughtfully allocate resources for our students.

### ***District Vision***

***To be a community of excellence achieved through a commitment to high performance, morale and involvement.***



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Our district is committed to meeting the needs of all learners, including our diverse population of high-need students with disabilities. The cost of supporting just one student with significant needs can exceed one hundred thousand dollars annually.

Furthermore, student mental health challenges have become a growing barrier to attendance, academic performance, and overall well-being in our district. Any new aid formula must recognize the critical need for funding to support community school initiatives, mental health services, and academic recovery pathways within schools. These supports are vital for us to fulfill our educational mission in the current landscape.

In 2023 Foundation Aid was fully funded and we believed that we would finally be able to have stability in resources so that we could responsibly conduct multiyear projections and planning. This year's walk back on the commitment to fully fund schools eliminated this ability.

New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents outline a wonderful array of possible learning pathways for students. If smaller school districts are not adequately and predictably funded, students in our districts will not be able to benefit from these varied opportunities that larger more wealthy school districts can afford for their students, compounding the cycle of inequity.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.

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