

Rockefeller Institute of Government

Foundation Aid Formula Study

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My name is Henry Rubio, President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). On behalf of our 6,500 in-service and 11,500 retired school leaders who dedicate their lives to New York City families, I express our deep commitment to ensuring that every child in our city has access to the highest quality education.

We are grateful for the State's commitment to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula starting in Fiscal Year 2024. This funding has been critical in allowing our schools to provide essential services and high-quality programs to our students. However, it is clear that the educational and mental health needs of our students have evolved significantly over the seventeen years since the formula's inception in 2007.

We commend the State for its decision to reform the outdated formula and for providing the necessary funds to the Rockefeller Institute to conduct these crucial hearings. We also thank the Rockefeller Institute of Government for giving all stakeholders, including those of us on the frontlines, the opportunity to provide input and recommendations.

To truly meet the needs of our students, the Foundation Aid formula must be revised to reflect current student demographics, shifts in education policy, rising educational costs, and the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Our school leaders, who work with these students every day, have a deep understanding of what is needed to adequately support our children. We hope you will consider our members' perspectives on how the Foundation Aid formula can be reformed to more effectively and equitably serve New York City students.

Temporary Housing Weights

The current Foundation Aid formula does not adequately address the unique challenges faced by students in temporary housing and the foster care system. The number of homeless public-school students in New York City has recently reached an all-time high of nearly 120,000, meaning that approximately 1 in every 9 students is homeless. Since April 2022, New York City has seen an influx of nearly 40,000 asylum-seeking students, many of whom need specific support services, including access to bilingual staff, translation services, mental health resources, and temporary housing coordinators. The Foundation Aid formula must ensure that these students—and others in temporary housing—have the stability and support necessary to succeed academically. As many of these new arrivals are also English-language learners, the formula must also provide for relevant support services to ensure their lack of proficiency does not impede their learning.

Special Education Weights

There are over 200,000 students with disabilities in New York City who deserve a fair and equitable education. The current formula applies the same weight to all special education students, regardless of whether the students have physical or intellectual disabilities or their individual needs as articulated in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The formula must reflect the varying levels of support required by different students. We urge the State to increase the special education weights and create tiered weights to ensure that resources are allocated to meet the specific needs of all students.

Class Size Reduction

New York City is unique in its legal obligation to reduce class sizes by 2028. While we fully support this mandate due to its potential positive impacts on students, the law presents significant challenges regarding funding, staffing, and space. The Independent Budget Office and the Comptroller's Office estimate that hiring the additional 10,000 to 12,000 teachers needed to implement the law will cost over \$1.5 billion, not to mention the immense capital expenditures required to create additional classroom space and the building of additional schools. The State must allocate additional funding to specifically support class size reduction in New York City, and this funding must be incorporated into the Foundation Aid formula.

Regional Cost Indexes

The regional cost indexes that are part of the Foundation Aid formula, which account for varying labor costs across different regions of the state, have remained unchanged since the formula's creation. Meanwhile, the cost of living and operating schools in New York City has increased significantly. The State regularly updates the building aid formula with a higher regional cost adjustment, and the Foundation Aid formula should receive the same consideration to reflect the true, elevated cost of educating students in New York City.

Up-to-Date Data

To ensure that the Foundation Aid formula is effective and fair, it must always reflect the most recent and accurate census data available. This means regularly updating the inputs that drive the formula, including enrollment figures, student needs, and other critical factors. Additionally, the methods used to determine the base cost of education per student currently take the average per-student spending from districts deemed "successful" according to proficiency rates from 2012. This outdated approach must be revised to reflect current realities.

The Foundation Aid formula is critical in ensuring that every child in New York City has access to a high-quality education. As the needs of our students grow and change, so must the formula. School supervisors and administrators who lead our school communities each and every day have valuable insights into what resources are needed to improve our schools. They recognize that the current level of Foundation Aid, even if fully funded, is not enough to provide the high-quality education our students deserve, particularly given the change in the formula's inflation metric. State funding currently only covers about 37% of the total costs for New York City education, whereas it was split evenly with city funding twenty years ago. By listening to and addressing the concerns of those who are closest to our students—the principals, assistant principals, and other administrators who run our schools—we can ensure that the Foundation Aid formula truly serves the needs of every student in New York City.