



Business Administrator
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Date: Friday, September 6, 2024
Subject: NYS Foundation Aid

To Whom it May Concern,

Public education is the cornerstone of our democracy, and remains our best path to advancing equal opportunity at a time of deepening inequality. Public schools serve children of all abilities and identities, and turn away no one. Adequately and equitably funding our public schools to meet the diverse needs of students is not just important; it is essential to ensuring their success and our shared prosperity. Prioritizing public education means investing in a just and prosperous future for all New Yorkers.

I have been the Business Administrator for the Cortland Enlarged City School District since October 2021. I was previously a secondary mathematics teacher at Newfield Senior High School in Newfield, NY for thirteen years. In both positions, as a teacher and as an administrator in charge of managing the district budget, I have grown to realize the complexities surrounding school funding. With a Tax Levy Limit and a formula for calculating State Foundation Aid that does not match the increases in costs for goods and services that are driven by a consistently high Consumer Price Index, the gap between what is available for funding schools and what is needed to maintain programming for students is becoming narrower with each passing year, resulting in districts being forced to dip into and deplete their savings accounts.

In Cortland, our largest revenue source is State Aid, which accounts for about two-thirds of the total budget. About 73% of our State Aid is in the form of Foundation Aid, which is about 44% of the total district budget. It is very likely that any changes to the Foundation Aid Formula will result in significant impacts to the expense budget, where some districts will receive an increase in aid and others will see a decrease in aid. We understand that changes to the Foundation Aid formula are likely going to take place, but there exists a high level of anxiety within each district due to the possibility that a change in the formula will likely result in significant negative impacts to the district.

In the past few years, with a decrease in student enrollment, the Foundation Aid Formula has calculated a downward trend in funding. Cortland has been considered a "hold-harmless" district, where we have been given at least the same amount in Foundation Aid as the previous year, regardless if the formula calculates a lower amount. In the past year, it has been suggested by the Governor that the state legislature should consider eliminating the hold-harmless provision. If enacted as such, Cortland would anticipate receiving approximately one million dollars less in funding, which would result in reductions in staff and increasing class sizes.

In theory, when there is a reduction in enrollment, a reduction in aid seems like a reasonable option since there would not be a need for the same level of staffing. However, schools are continuously facing new state mandates that require districts to expend more funds to remain in compliance. This includes the upcoming Zero-Emission mandate. The Foundation Aid formula, as it currently stands today, does not account for these new mandates, and does not factor in the deteriorating condition of school buildings, student furniture needs, or the need for additional staff to help students with increases of emotional and psychological support, just to name a few.



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The Foundation Aid formula should be updated to reflect the real cost of educating students today, so that every public school has the resources it needs to support all students. Any modifications to the formula must be made on the basis of how much it costs to ensure public schools are getting the resources to meet their students' needs.

With this in mind, I encourage those who are in a state leadership position to consider creative alternatives for calculating state aid based on the unique needs of each district.

Underfunding schools is not an option. The state's fiscal circumstances should not form the basis for calculating the true cost of educating a child.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kris William'.

Kristopher Williamson
Business Administrator

cc: Board of Education