

The NYS Foundation Aid formula was introduced in 2007 to make public school education equitable by accounting for student need and community wealth. Because of the 2007 global financial crisis, it was not fully implemented until 2017.

Foundation Aid starts with what it costs to educate a child in “successful” districts. It then subtracts an expected contribution from the district and multiplies that difference by the number of students. This is the district’s Foundation Aid.

Despite spending the most per student of any state, NY student performance is only average. This suggests that Foundation Aid funding is inadequate, misdirected or that aid is not the only problem with the state education system.

- Adequacy - If asked how much more it would need, Cortland might request \$5M (15%). If districts all asked for that much, the state might need \$4B more for Foundation Aid.
- Misdirection - School performance correlates with affluence; poor districts don’t get all they need. How to adjust for student need and community wealth needs updating.
- Other Problems - Administrators can attest to the complexity of education laws and regulations. Bureaucracy, lack of responsiveness and antiquated website do not help.

Given that its mandate is limited to Foundation Aid, two relatively inexpensive things that the commission might do first would be to:

1. Ask districts that aren’t successful, how much they would need to be successful. – Similarities between districts needing a high percentage increase would suggest where there are deficiencies in the Foundation Aid formula.
2. Look to Massachusetts. – Their schools are routinely ranked first in the nation. How do they fund their districts? Compare Foundation Aid to the aid Massachusetts would provide to NY school districts.

After determining what isn’t working in NY and what is working elsewhere, the commission could recommend specific improvements to the Foundation Aid formula.