

Task force recommends changes to state's school aid formula

By Keshia Clukey

10/12/2016 05:31 PM EDT

ALBANY - A task force made up of school finance leaders from across the state released recommended changes to the state's school aid formula on Wednesday, changes they hope the Legislature will consider during the 2017 session.

"Our Task Force recommendations provide a guide to changing the state aid conversation from restoring cuts to improving the formula to provide an education system where all students have the opportunity for success," Michael Borges, executive director of the New York State Association of School Business Officials, which created the task force and commissioned the study, said in a statement.

The goal of the task force was to recommend revisions to the nearly decade-old aid formula to make it more equitable, ensure it provides adequate funding for all students and make it more stable and predictable for long-term planning, according to the release.

The suggestions were sent to the state Board of Regents and Legislature.

The roughly 70-page Foundation Aid formula was established after the state Court of Appeals in 2006 ruled that New York was underfunding its schools and not meeting its constitutional burden to provide children with a "sound basic education." That case focused on New York City schools, but the state later put the formula in place for all districts to provide more equitable funding statewide.

The formula takes into consideration a number of factors, but is based on four main points: the cost of a successful education, student need, regional cost differences and local district fiscal capacity. The formula, however, was never fully phased in because of the recession.

School aid has seen substantial increases under Gov. Andrew Cuomo, but it would take \$3.8 billion to fully fund the formula, according to the New York State Association of School Business Officials.

The task force recommended phasing in the Foundation Aid formula over three years, and is asking the state to commit to it in law so districts can count on and plan for the aid increases.

But advocates including NYSASBO and education leaders are also [calling for changes](#) to the formula itself as the state's poverty rate has increased, the population of English language learners has surged, costs for special education students have shifted and regional and district demographics have significantly changed.

The task force's recommendations include phasing out the free and reduced-price lunch calculation - a factor used in determining poverty and need in a district - in favor of a more reliable "direct certification," which would automatically include students eligible for free lunch based on participation in other programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid. The group also suggested adjusting the measurements for poverty to reflect costs around the state and increasing aid for districts with higher concentrations of poverty.

The recommendations include the need for an updated study of the costs of educating students, particularly taking into account English language learners and unaccompanied minors.

The State Education Department earlier this month was required by legislation to send a report to the Legislature and Cuomo outlining what it would like to see changed as a result of formula revisions undertaken during the budget process. Some of the task force recommendations were similar to those of the departments.

Changes to the formula will be an ongoing discussion between education advocacy groups, state education and legislative leaders as 2017-18 budget discussions begin.

"The economy of our state and nation depends on the success of our schools to educate children capable of successfully performing the jobs of tomorrow," the task force study states. "The education system requires resources, high standards and accountability systems that support learning for all students."

Read the full study and recommendations here: <http://politi.co/2dSCtio>

To view online:

<http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2016/10/school-finance-leaders-recommend-changes-to-school-aid-formula-ahead-of-2017-budget-process-106328>