

Improve aid formula to help students succeed

Michael Borges and Lauren Poehlman 6:18 p.m. EDT October 15, 2016



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Foundation aid is a 2007 promise government made to provide New York's children the sound basic education mandated by our state constitution. The promise was long deferred by the Great Recession. The 2016 state budget finally ended the cuts to school districts known as the Gap Elimination Adjustment.

This year the conversation changes from cuts to improving the formula so that all students can succeed. Profound inequities impact outcomes for children living in poverty, without English-speaking families, or with disabilities, as well as black and Hispanic students. Until their schools are funded adequately nothing changes. Foundation Aid drives nearly 70 percent of state funds to schools, and after a decade it's time to re-examine the formula. Our future depends on it.

The NYSASBO Foundation Aid Task Force includes the CFOs in the state's school districts and BOCES. We know school finances, the complexities of the formulas, and their impact on learning in important things such as class size. We make local budgets using resources strategically to improve learning. Our task force has produced a series of recommendations for improvements in Foundation Aid arranged according to three driving goals essential to success: equity, adequacy and stability.

Goal 1: The aid formula should be equitable, using fair adjustments for student needs based on limited English proficiency, disability and a more accurate measure of poverty, such as eligibility for public assistance. State aid should adjust for school district wealth with special attention for those with the least ability to pay. This approach would allow Rochester schools to provide more social and emotional supports, more targeted training for our teachers, and more specialized instruction for our English language learners.

Goal 2: The aid formula should be adequate to provide all students the opportunity for success in meeting Regents learning standards. The Successful Schools study used in 2007 formula needs to be updated for costs all over the state. The study should assess costs in the growing numbers of English Language Learners and unaccompanied minors entering schools. This year, the Rochester City School District educates nearly 12,000 students who have disabilities, are learning English as a second language, and/or will be homeless during the school year.

Goal 3: The aid formula should be stable to allow long-term planning for finances and instruction. The state should commit to full phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula with regular cost-study updates. With annual inflationary increases in between studies, the funding formula will be sustainable — allowing districts to stabilize program funding and provide more consistent learning environments for high-need students.

We seek revisions in the Foundation Aid formula to meet the promise of a sound basic education through equity, adequacy and stability. When all children have the opportunity for success, we can build a work force ready for the future. The NYSASBO Foundation Aid Task Force recommendations are available at www.nysasbo.org.

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