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Time for state to pay promised school aid: View

Michael Borges 12:54 p.m. EST November 21, 2016



(Photo: Tania Savayan/The Journal News)

With the complete phasing out of the Gap Elimination Adjustment in 2016, New York State took an important first step toward providing adequate school funding. This year, the New York State Association of School Business Officials is calling on the state to finish what it started last year by fully funding the "foundation aid" formula. A fully funded formula, together with timely adjustments to several reimbursement rates, would ensure that New York's students receive an adequate and equitable education at a cost taxpayers can afford in 2017-18.

NYSASBO is calling for a \$1.9 billion increase in state funding for the general foundation-aid formula and "categorical aids," with a goal of providing all children with the sound basic education mandated by the State Constitution.

We are also proposing that the state budget \$3.8 billion in overdue foundation aid, phased in over three years. Doing so would reduce the need for school districts to raise local property taxes.

The formulas for foundation aid were enacted into law in 2007 as a promise. However, due to cuts made during the "Great Recession," schools are \$3.8 billion behind in anticipated payments. Fully funding foundation aid would be an affordable way to deliver the education the public expects for all New York's students.

[ACTIVISTS: School-aid advocates walking to Albany \(/story/news/education/2016/10/03/education-aid-walk/91466054/\)](/story/news/education/2016/10/03/education-aid-walk/91466054/)

[INVESTIGATION: Why NY's school-aid formula is flunking \(/story/news/politics/2016/08/25/new-york-school-aid-formula/89326638/\)](/story/news/politics/2016/08/25/new-york-school-aid-formula/89326638/)

[VIEW: NY's schools aren't failing; they're starving \(/story/opinion/contributors/2015/03/12/troubled-public-schools-starving-failing/70227894/\)](/story/opinion/contributors/2015/03/12/troubled-public-schools-starving-failing/70227894/)

Our plan also seeks an additional \$157 million in state support for career and technical education, school nutrition, programs for English language learners, prior-year adjustments and planning grants. Priorities include:

- The growing numbers of English language learners and unaccompanied minors across New York come with necessary additional costs currently shouldered by their home districts. NYSASBO calls for an additional \$100 million in aid to cover these costs.
- Both our economy and our students need stronger career and technical education programs. These programs build essential connections between education and job opportunities while reducing high school dropout rates. But CTE programs have had the same aid limits for two decades. They must be adjusted to meet the needs of students who want training for real careers with a future.
- Hungry students don't learn as well as they should. School districts feed children every day, yet school lunch reimbursement rates have been unchanged for 40 years. Schools cannot provide nutritious food at a rate of 6 cents a meal. NYSASBO supports the New York State School Nutrition Association's "Drive for 25" initiative to provide an additional 20 cents per meal when 25 percent of their purchases are made from in-state vendors.
- Few realize that the state owes school districts \$320 million for services already rendered, but that were billed late to Albany. The state pays only \$18 million a year on these debts, putting an added burden on districts. We are calling on the state to pay off these debts over three years.

As New York State's economy continues to grow, state policymakers can pursue further prosperity by investing in education. NYSASBO's proposals are offered to help state leaders develop a budget that will support school districts to be more efficient and effective in meeting the needs of students.

Our 2017-18 school aid proposal (http://www.nysasbo.org/uploads/publications/1478716623_NYSASBO%20State%20Aid%20Proposal%202016-Final.pdf) can be found at www.nysasbo.org (<http://www.nysasbo.org/>).

The writer is executive director of the New York State Association of School Business Officials.

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