

Improve the formula for success

By Michael Borges, Commentary Published 4:14 pm, Tuesday, October 11, 2016

Foundation Aid is a promise our government made in 2007 to provide New York's children the sound basic education mandated by our state constitution. It is a promise long deferred by the Great Recession and resulting shortfalls in state finances. The 2016 State budget finally ended the cuts imposed on school districts, otherwise know as the Gap Elimination Adjustment. Still, nearly a generation of students has been left without the equitable, adequate or stable school funding that Foundation Aid was intended to provide.

This year, we can change the conversation from restoring cuts to improving the formula to provide an education system where all students have the opportunity for success.

For decades, it has been clear that profound inequities impact school outcomes for children living in poverty, those not born to English-speaking families or with disabilities, as well as black and Hispanic students. Until the schools those children attend are funded adequately, nothing will change.

Foundation Aid is the funding category that drives nearly 70 percent of state funds to schools. It has been a decade since it was created. Now is the time to re-examine the formula for school aid. Our future depends on it.

The **New York State Association of School Business Officials** convened a Foundation Aid Task Force to examine the opportunities, challenges and solutions for improving education funding. The association's 2,100 members include the CFOs in the state's school districts and BOCES. We know public school finances, especially the complexities of the formulas and their impact on learning opportunities, important things like class size.

We make local budgets and implement them using resources strategically to improve learning. The task force is composed of school finance leaders representative of the state's diverse school districts. We've produced a series of common sense recommendations for needed improvements in Foundation Aid.

Our recommendations are arranged according to three driving goals essential to success: equity, adequacy and stability.

- **Equity:** The aid formula should use current, accurate and 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 districts least able to pay.
- **Adequacy:** The formula should be adequate to provide all students in all districts the opportunity for success in meeting Regents learning standards for college and career readiness. The **Successful Schools** study used for the 2007 formula needs to be updated for cost of education in all regions of the state. In particular, the study should assess the cost of success with the growing numbers of English language learners and unaccompanied minors entering New York schools.
- **Stability:** The formula should be stable and predictable, to allow school districts to do long-term financial and instructional planning. The state should commit to full phase-in of the Foundation Aid formula, with cost study updates at regular intervals. With annual inflationary increases in between studies, the funding formula will be sustainable into the future.

The 2007 Foundation Aid formula was budgeted, but never fully phased in.

The 2016 budget is still \$3.8 billion short of full funding, most of it due to high need school districts. New York needs to revise the formula to bring about a school system that meets the promise of a sound, basic education through equity, adequacy and stability.

The **NYSASBO Foundation Aid** Task Force recommendations will be released next week as an early contribution to the school funding conversation that continues throughout the budget-making process.

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