

Another Voice: State has yet to fully fund New York's schools

By Michael Borges

With the complete phaseout of the Gap Elimination Adjustment in 2016, New York took an important first step toward providing adequate school funding. Now the New York State Association of School Business Officials (NYSASBO) is calling on the state to finish what it started by fully funding the Foundation Aid formula. Together with timely adjustments to several reimbursement rates, a fully funded Foundation Aid formula will ensure that our students receive an adequate and equitable education at a cost taxpayers can afford.

NYSASBO is calling for a \$1.9 billion increase in formula and categorical aids for the 2017-18 school year to provide all children the sound, basic education mandated by the State Constitution. NYSASBO's plan also seeks specific increases for career and technical education, school nutrition, English language learners, prior year adjustments and strategic resource planning for an additional \$157 million in state support.

NYSASBO proposes a three-year phase-in of overdue Foundation Aid. The formula for Foundation Aid was enacted into law in 2007 as a promise. However, due to the 2008 Great Recession, schools are \$3.8 billion behind in anticipated Foundation Aid payments. This plan to fully fund Foundation Aid is an affordable way to deliver the education the public expects for all New York's students.

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 categorical aid to cover these added costs.

Both our economy and our students need stronger career and technical education programs. Career and technical education builds essential connections between education and job opportunities while reducing high school dropout rates.

Hungry students don't learn as well as they can. All school districts feed children every day, yet the school lunch reimbursement rates have been unchanged for 40 years.

Many school districts struggle with the burden of unreimbursed state aid claims for services already provided to children. Back payments of over \$320 million are due to districts for mandated services to meet the immediate needs of children, yet the state currently pays only \$18 million a year on these debts. At this rate it will take 18 years for districts with growing school populations to catch up. NYSASBO recommends that the state pay these obligations over three years.

As New York State's economy continues to revive and grow, state policymakers have the opportunity to pursue further economic prosperity by investing in the education of our future workforce. The NYSASBO proposals are offered to support state leaders as they develop a budget that will support school districts to be more efficient and effective in delivering education programs in every community of the state.

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