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Students deserve the benefits of Foundation Aid funding

By Michael Borges, Commentary Published 3:18 pm, Tuesday, January 31, 2017

As the 2017 legislative session gets underway, we are hopeful that New York will seize the opportunity to get state aid right. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo has issued a disturbing budget proposal that ignores the intent and purpose of Foundation Aid.

Foundation Aid was created in 2007 with calculations made for the cost of student success based on real data from school districts educating real students. A phase-in of Foundation Aid was promised to an entire generation of students.

The state, however, put that on hold amid the 2008 recession, and has never fully gotten back on track. The result is an accumulated unpaid bill to districts of \$4.3 billion. Over three-quarters of the never-delivered-funds are owed to high-need schools.

More Information

Michael Borges is the executive director of the New York State Association of School Business Officials.

The governor now proposes to throw away the phase-in with a one-time payment that continues the culture of failing schools.

Our constitution says that "the state shall provide a system of education wherein all children

shall be educated." That's precisely what the 2007 Foundation Aid promise intended to build.

Recent reports by the New York State Association of School Business Officials (NYSASBO) document the disparity between the education offered to children living in poverty and the rest of New York's kids. The resource and achievement gap continues to grow, as unmet student needs soar. High and low needs schools spend different amounts per child, and every year the results reflect that difference.

The state share of school funding needs to increase, with a concentration on adequate funding for children living in poverty. NYSASBO applauds the updated approach the governor proposes to calculate poverty. That will direct funds more accurately.

But we cannot cancel the phase-in of Foundation Aid. New York can afford to correct the inequities in the current funding stream without taking away the dollar gains all districts have welcomed in recent years.

We are at a turning point. This year it is crucial to make necessary changes in Foundation Aid, to provide the educational opportunity the laws intended. Our Foundation Aid Task Force has recommended specific changes to improve the formula's equity, adequacy and stability, along with a three-year phase-in of the remaining \$4.3 billion in Foundation Aid promised to schools in 2007 by state leaders. The Board of Regents echoed this call in its state aid proposal. There is a broad consensus for the phase-in across the education spectrum, contradicting the governor's shortsighted proposal.

One year can make an enormous difference in a student's academic success. Every year that goes by without fully funding Foundation Aid is a lost year for tens of thousands of students.

In 2017, the education budget can offer all students in the state an equal opportunity to learn and achieve success, regardless of where they live. We must do what is right for all children now, so that the future is brighter and more prosperous for all of us.

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