

# THE TALE OF TWO NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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## PEEKSKILL SCHOOLS & SCARSDALE SCHOOLS

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**The Alliance for Quality Education** is a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high-quality public school education to all students regardless of zip code. Combining its legislative and policy expertise with grassroots organizing, AQE advances proven-to-work strategies that lead to student success and echoes a powerful public demand for a high-quality public school education for all of New York's students.

**The Public Policy Education Fund** was founded in 1986 to address critical social, economic, racial and environmental issues facing low and moderate income New York State residents. Our areas of work have included health care, education, after-school programs, voter participation, economic development and consumer issues. PPEF uses many tools in its work, including grassroots organizing, research and policy development, public education on a wide range of policy issues, and community outreach.

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# THE TALE OF TWO NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

## PEEKSKILL SCHOOLS & SCARSDALE SCHOOLS

In New York State, every child has the right to a quality education as granted by the state's constitution. New York houses some of the best schools in the nation and even in the world. While some school districts provide a top notch education, with advanced coursework and extracurricular clubs and activities that help launch students into Ivy League schools, others have a small selection of Advanced Placement courses and few college level electives, and only a handful of extracurricular activities. The school districts that are able to provide extraordinary opportunities to their students are incredibly well resourced, frequently spending \$30,000 or more per pupil, with that money going into programs, classes and activities.

These districts are usually made up of mostly White students that come from affluent families who already have much greater opportunities in life. Low income districts usually have a much more diverse student population, often predominantly educating Black and Brown students. They also educate greater percentages of students with higher educational needs resulting from living in poverty, disability or learning English. Due to Governor Cuomo's failure to Fund the State's Foundation Aid formula, they also have much less funding available to educate their students. In this report, we provide examples of programs that help meet students' need and enable them to graduate and go on to college. These programs include art and music, advanced courses, sports and clubs as examples of the pattern of inequity that exists across the state. This comparison illustrates that more resources mean more opportunities for students, and that money matters in education. The great inequities that exist between our schools are a function of the Governor's denial to meet the state's constitutional obligation to provide all students with a "sound basic education." The fact that high schools that educate predominantly Black and Brown students are in districts owed the most amount of Foundation Aid and are able to offer fewer college level or advanced courses, is evidence of the educational racism that is perpetuated by the Governor Cuomo's policies.

## A NOTE REGARDING THE SCHOOLS COMPARED

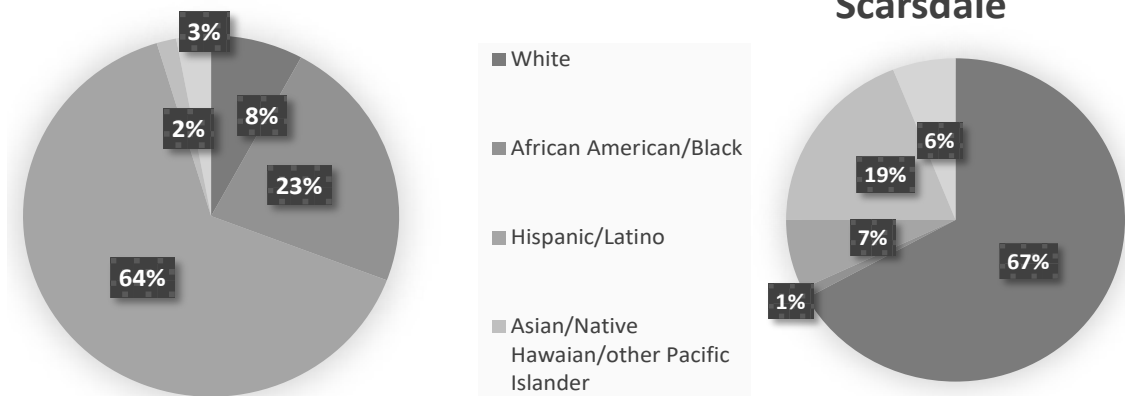
The two high schools compared in this report are Peekskill and Scarsdale High School. In our comparison of course work we aim to illustrate that funding enables access to great programming. We by no means suggest that students in affluent areas should have less. Instead, we demand that the Governor and State Legislature live up to their obligation and ensure that students in low income communities are not left behind because their communities do not have high property values and their families are not high income earners. Neither poverty nor race should be a determinant of the quality of education students receive.

## PEEKSKILL SCHOOLS AND SCARSDALE SCHOOLS

Peekskill school district is located in the town of Peekskill. It is a high need school district with a very diverse student population. Only 10% of Peekskill’s students are White. The majority of the students are Latino and Black. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of Peekskill’s students are economically disadvantaged, which means that they are participating in the free or reduced price lunch, or their family participates in government assistance programs such as Social Security Insurance (SSI), food stamps, foster care, etc. About one out five students is classified as having a disability. Eleven percent (11%) of the students are English Language Learners.

Just a few miles away, Scarsdale students have a different reality. The majority of the students are White (69%). Seventeen percent (17%) of students are Latino and 8% are Black. No student is classified as economically disadvantaged. Eleven percent (11%) of students are classified as students with disabilities. Scarsdale is an affluent community with median household income close to a quarter of a million dollars. <sup>1</sup>

### Student Demographics Peekskill Student Demographics Scarsdale



	ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
PEEKSKILL HS	79%	19%	11%
SCARSDALE HS	0	11%	1%

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lohud.com/story/marketplace/real-estate/scarsdale/2017/05/10/scarsdale-americas-rich-est-town/314724001/>

# THE REAL SPENDING PER PUPIL: STUDENT NEED MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Education research shows that students who live in poverty, students in special education, and students who are English Language Learners are more expensive to educate.<sup>2</sup> That research is backed by state law in New York. The State has determined how much more it costs to educate students in need by applying mathematic factors that account for living in poverty, being an English learner, and having a disability. The result of applying these factors is an increased enrollment count, called the *equity index*.<sup>1</sup>

When the total spending per pupil is calculated using the increased student count after the equity index is applied, we are able to see a more accurate spending per pupil. School districts that have more high need students require more resources to educate them and should be spending more per pupil than districts that have fewer such students. Yet, the opposite is true in New York. Taking into consideration student need and reflecting that in spending paints an accurate picture of a school's ability to provide for all the needs of their students.

## NEEDS OF STUDENTS

EVERY STUDENT COUNTS AS:



**ONE STUDENT**



**SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT (+1.41)**



**STUDENT LIVING IN POVERTY (+0.65)**



**STUDENT RECEIVING FREE/REDUCED PRICE LUNCH (+0.65)**



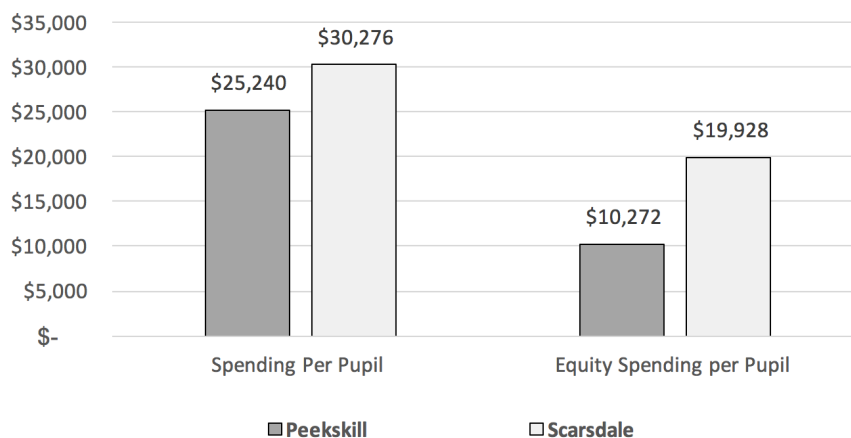
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (+0.5)**

Below, we show the spending per pupil for both of the school districts in this report. Scarsdale has by far the lower need and the higher spending. Peekskill has the greater need, and receives less funding. When the equity index is applied, Peekskill has far less funding per pupil, when it should have more money to support its high need student population.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/archives/11-7-02sfp3.htm>

Students who live in poverty are counted two and a half times more than students who do not live in poverty in New York State. Students who are English Language Learners are counted one and a half times more, and students who are classified as special education are counted 2.41 more as defined in the Foundation Aid Formula which was created in 2007 as a statewide settlement to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit.

### Spending per pupil Vs. Equity Spending Per Pupil



The spending gap between Scarsdale and Peekskill is \$5,036 per pupil. Peekskill’s ability to deploy resources to meet all students’ needs and provide the opportunity to have a more evenly distributed playing field is severely hindered by this gap.

**When the equity index is applied to reflect the student count when accounting for need, the gap grows to \$9,656.**

## MONEY = RESOURCES

The gap in per pupil funding translates into a real-life gap between the opportunities that each school is able to offer students. Peekskill high school can only offer eight Advanced Placement courses, whereas Scarsdale High School offers 24. Not only is the number of AP courses available at Scarsdale High School higher, there is also a greater variety, with more “unique” courses offered. For instance, Scarsdale offers Advanced Placement U.S. History; Comparative Government with Economics; Macroeconomics with American Government and Politics; American Government and Politics with Economics; Western Political, Economic, and Cultural Traditions; U.S. Constitutional Law; and International Politics and Economics: Global Issues in the 21st Century. By comparison, Peekskill only offers Advanced Placement World History, U.S. History, and Government and Politics.

Scarsdale High School offers AP Spanish, French and Mandarin, whereas Peekskill only offers Spanish.

Ninety nine percent of students in Scarsdale graduate with a Regents Diploma and go on to four year college.

Students in Peekskill have a choice of more traditional art classes, whereas in Scarsdale students can also take courses in architecture, jewelry making, ceramics, and computer animation.

The disparities between the two school districts are also painfully evident beyond the classroom. Scarsdale offers a greater number of varsity sports, with varsity skiing/snowboarding, ice hockey, golf and tennis, in addition to the varsity soccer, football,

basketball, baseball/softball, and swimming offered at Peekskill.

Advanced coursework, AP classes and electives like those listed above are not only enriching for students, but are important for students applying for four year colleges. Access to such opportunities, or the lack thereof, consequently impact students' plans for their futures.

**Ninety-nine (99%) percent of the students in Scarsdale High School graduate in four years and plan to attend four year college. The graduation rate for Peekskill is 72% but only 30% plan to attend a four-year college. Forty-two percent (42%) of students graduating plan to attend two-year college.**

Peekskill faces a great deal of unmet need because the state has neglected its obligation to fund Foundation Aid. Peekskill is currently owed \$14 million of the remaining Foundation Aid that was due by 2011 based on the statewide settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit.<sup>3</sup> Scarsdale is not owed any funding. Peekskill reports that it receives enough funding through the My Brother's Keeper<sup>4</sup> program to serve 75 young men of color who struggle in middle and high school. Yet that is only a third of the students at Peekskill who could benefit from the program.

Peekskill Basics is a program that encourages families to expose their children to language and literacy from birth to age five, with the aim of ensuring that children enter kindergarten with the skills necessary to succeed. Peekskill has a high proportion of students in early grades who are at least one grade level behind in reading. To reach every child living in the district, the Basics program needs to be expanded, but the district lacks the funding to expand it.

After school and summer programs are crucial for Peekskill to meet the needs of its growing immigrant population who are also English Language Learners (ELLs) and other students. Peekskill immigrant and ELL students need programs that help them learn English, gain the vocabulary, be exposed to English literature in order to succeed in school. The district no longer receives grants amounting to \$1.5 million that it previously used to fund extended day and summer programs. As a result, the district is no longer able to offer its summer intensive program that aimed at addressing literacy and language acquisition, skills often entirely or partly lost over summer break. In addition, Peekskill is no longer able to support after school programs that provided remediation, intervention and enrichment to students. Another severe loss for Peekskill is the loss of its McKinney Vento grant which supports homeless families with supplies and food and transportation. Peekskill has one of the largest per capita homeless population. The support of all these programs falls back to the district.

<sup>3</sup> The Campaign for Fiscal Equity was a lawsuit brought against the state in 1993 by parents who claimed that the state was chronically underfunding public schools. The lawsuit went through all levels of the court system to end up before the Court of Appeals (the state's highest court), which in 2006 ruled in favor of the parents, stating clearly that the state was violating its own constitution and ordered it to provide the funding. In 2007, newly elected Governor Spitzer and the legislature committed to providing \$5.5 billion in classroom operating aid known as Foundation Aid, over the course of 4 years to schools across the state. The state only provided two years of funding, before making massive cuts essentially taking most of the funding back in 2010 and 2011. Since then, the increases in Foundation Aid have been minimal.

<sup>4</sup> My Brother's Keeper is a program supported by state funds to provide opportunities, services and interventions to at risk young men and boys of color.

## SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY & WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO DISMANTLE IT

There are some schools in the state, located in very affluent communities that offer a world class education. These communities have local wealth allows them to raise a high level of revenues for their local schools. Schools such as Scarsdale and Byram Hills in Westchester, or Syosset and Jericho on Long Island offer college level classes and electives that allow students to enter college with several credits already earned, and allows them to build a portfolio that makes them highly competitive for the colleges and universities of their choice. Scarsdale High School is highlighted in this report as a way to illustrate the great opportunities that students enjoy at these public schools. Every student, regardless of where they go to school is entitled to a great education.

Schools such as Peekskill are determined to offer the best they can with the resources they have available. Their ability to raise local revenue is limited as their residents have lower income. The role of the state is to equalize the field by providing adequate and equitably distributed funding to communities with lower income.

New York State is violating students' constitutional right to "a sound basic education" and perpetuating educational inequity in NYS. This report is a glimpse into New York State's educational equity dilemma and is a call to tackle this inequity if we are to have education and racial justice in NYS.

**In order to make equity a reality for all students and increase access to opportunities for Black, Brown and low-income students, Governor Cuomo and the State legislature must commit to fully funding the Foundation Aid formula in the 2018-19 state budget. At least \$1.4 billion in Foundation Aid and a commitment to a three year phase-in are needed in order to fund the programs necessary for student success.**

### *Some more explanation on Spending Per Pupil Vs. Equity Spending Per Pupil:*

Research shows that students who live in poverty, students in special education, and students who are English Language Learners are more expensive to educate. State law includes within the funding formula "weights" or mathematical factors are accounting for poverty, students with disabilities or students that are English language learners. The weights are applied to the enrollment of the school district, counting every student in poverty an additional 2.3 times, every student who is an English learner an additional 1.5 times, every student who has a disability an additional 2.41 times to bring the total enrollment number up to account for the increased resources necessary to educate them. For each school district in the state the average spending per pupil is publicly reported. This is the amount of funding that school districts have available to spend in order to provide for personnel, classroom materials, transportation, building maintenance, and everything that schools need to function. We also show the equity spending per pupil, after we apply the Equity Index to the total expenditures of the school district. The Equity Index is a way of increasing the total student count in order to reflect the actual need of the students in the school district. The weightings that is written in New York state law are everyone one student who:

- lives in poverty counts as measured by participation in the free lunch program as an additional .65;
- census poverty counts as an additional .65;
- is an English learner counts as an additional .50;
- is in special education counts as an additional 1.41.