

# VIEW FROM THE CLASSROOM

## THE REALITY OF UNDERFUNDING IN NEW YORK'S SCHOOLS

AQE and Senator Robert Jackson went to schools and districts around New York State to document unmet student need. Along the tour, we heard schools and school districts raise many of the same challenges resulting from systematic underfunding. Foundation Aid, basic classroom operating aid, is the largest part of school aid in the State budget. The State has not fully funded Foundation Aid since 2009, just two years after it first implemented it. District and school representatives in every region on the state said with resources stretched so thin, and there is little more they can do without an increase in funding.

### THE TOUR STOPS INCLUDED:

SCHOOL DISTRICT	COUNTY	TYPE OF HIGH NEED DISTRICT	ENROLLMENT	FOUNDATION AID OWED
Albany	Albany	Small city	9,500	\$27,079,034
Brentwood	Suffolk	Suburban	19,052	\$137,344,957
Ellenville	Ulster	Rural	1,572	\$4,088,470
New York City	Kings/ Queens/ New York/ Bronx	Large City	1,048,617	\$1,459,181,316
Mount Vernon	Westchester	Small city	7,850	\$6,016,466
Peekskill	Westchester	Small city	3,312	\$15,953,703
Rochester	Monroe	Large City	26,687	\$96,975,585
Schenectady	Schenectady	Small City	9,251	\$46,300,793
Syracuse	Onondaga	Large City	19,543	\$45,430,046
Westbury	Nassau	Suburban	5,090	\$41,170,730

## 2019-20 STATE BUDGET

2019-20 marks the first year ever that both houses of the legislature have proposed, in their one-house budgets, a plan to fully fund Foundation Aid. Both the State Assembly and Senate included a three year phase-in to fully fund the \$4.1 billion in Foundation Aid that is owed to students and schools based on current state law and in accordance with the statewide solution to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

By contrast Governor Cuomo proposed a mere \$338 million Foundation Aid increase, even though two-thirds of the total unpaid Foundation Aid is owed to

schools that are comprised of a majority of students of color. The Governor included no plan to ever phase-in the full Foundation Aid that is owed to students and schools, instead he dismissed this funding as “ghosts of the past and distractions from the present.” The school tour and subsequent report show exactly how the state’s failure to fund Foundation Aid is haunting our children’s educational opportunities in the present day.



# THOUGH NEW YORK'S SCHOOLS ARE ATTEMPTING GREAT THINGS WITH THE RESOURCES THEY HAVE, THE AREAS OF NEED ARE EVIDENT.



**TRAUMA UNADDRESSED** — Expanded access to social/emotional and mental health personnel and programs was identified as a need in almost every school we visited. For instance, Ellenville Central School District has no social worker on staff for its 1,600 students.

**LIBRARIES WITHOUT LIBRARIANS** — Many schools do not have a librarian, or share one librarian among several schools. Having a library but not a librarian means that the library cannot be fully utilized, and students miss out on important research and media skills and opportunities to be exposed to the joys and benefits of reading.



**CLASS SIZES ARE TOO LARGE** — Most of the schools we visited had average class sizes between 25-35 students. In many schools, we toured classrooms so cramped that students were not able to move around. In P.S. 95 Eastwood in Queens, most classes have 32 students.



**LACK OF PRE-K PROGRAMS FOR ALL STUDENTS** — Some school districts have no pre-K programs, while others can only offer a half-day program (2.5 hours per day) or a full-day program that is not large enough to enroll every eligible four-year-old. Ellenville Central School District offers two half-day pre-K programs, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. When they had to cut its mid-day bus service, the district saw a 25 percent drop in families that were able to participate.



**EVERY INCH COUNTS** — In some districts, students attend classes in trailers, hallways, storage closets, basements, locker rooms, the principal's office, in front of elevator banks or even off site, due to a lack of classroom space in the school building. Many school buildings are in dire need of maintenance and expansion, and need renovations to become accessible.

**SCIENCE WITHOUT SCIENCE LABS** — Many schools lack science labs and up-to-date equipment for students to be able to conduct experiments and learn-by-doing. Facing History High School in Manhattan can only have science experiments performed by the teacher while students observe. This leaves students at a disadvantage for state tests and college admissions requiring advanced science instruction.



**TECHNOLOGY IS OUTDATED** — Some schools have technology, computers and software that is decades old. Most school district officials report that there is not enough funding to maintain or repair the devices their schools currently have, much less to purchase up-to-date devices for all students to accommodate the needs of the 21st century. All the schools in New York City, as well as Mount Vernon, Peekskill, Schenectady and Brentwood, do not have up-to-date technology.

