



EDUCATION JUSTICE IS RACIAL JUSTICE

*A Candidate Guide for Education Equity
in New York State in 2020*

NEW YORK EDUCATION ISSUES

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CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY

Money matters; without adequate resources, schools cannot educate students. The availability of resources closely correlates with opportunities and outcomes. We believe school aid distribution should be based on student and school district need. New York currently ranks 49th in the nation on equity in education spending.¹

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) was created by parents who filed a lawsuit against the State of New York, claiming that children were not being provided the opportunity for an adequate education. In 2006, the New York State Court of Appeals ruled in CFE's favor, and found that New York State is violating students constitutional right to a "sound and basic education" by leaving schools without the necessary funding. As a result of the ruling, schools were ordered to receive \$5.5 billion increase in basic operating aid (also known as Foundation Aid) statewide over the course of a four year phase-in from 2007 to 2011.

What is the Foundation Aid Formula? This formula was created in response to the CFE ruling to distribute state aid based on student need. It accounts for the ability of the school district or city to raise money from local property taxes and was intended to close the spending gap between districts and create an equitable education system for all students.

The state has made incremental increases to education funding, but is still far from fulfilling the promise of CFE.

Today, Foundation Aid levels remain much lower than the CFE recommendation. According to the New York State Department of Education schools are still owed over \$4 billion in Foundation Aid, most of which is owed to districts with high percentages of Black, Brown and low-income students.

Schools in New York State are owed \$4.2 billion in Foundation Aid.

See appendix for a breakdown of Foundation Aid owed by senate district statewide.

¹ School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share? The Urban Institute, Accessed June 7, 2018: <http://apps.urban.org/features/school-funding-do-poor-kids-get-fair-share/>

TIMELINE:

THE PROMISE OF CFE & FOUNDATION AID

2007-08

Governor Spitzer

\$1.767 billion increase

\$1.1 billion Foundation Aid

2008-09

Governor Spitzer

\$1.716 billion increase

\$1.2 billion Foundation Aid

2009-10

Governor Paterson

\$0 increase

Flat funding translated into classroom cuts for school districts across the state.

2010-11

Governor Paterson

\$1.4 billion cut

The state made massive cuts by borrowing money from schools through the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). School districts all across the state made massive cuts to program and staff.

2011-12

Governor Cuomo

\$1.3 billion cut

2012-13

Governor Cuomo

\$805 million increase

\$400 million GEA Restoration

\$112 million Foundation Aid

2013-14

Governor Cuomo

\$944 million increase

\$517 million GEA Restoration

\$172 million Foundation Aid

2014-15

Governor Cuomo

\$1.1 billion increase

\$602 million GEA Restoration

\$250 million Foundation Aid

2015-16

Governor Cuomo

\$1.3 billion increase

\$603 million GEA Restoration

\$428 million Foundation Aid

2016-17

Governor Cuomo

\$1.35 billion increase

\$434 million GEA Restoration

\$627 million Foundation Aid

2017-18

Governor Cuomo

\$1 billion increase

\$700 million Foundation Aid

2018-19

Governor Cuomo

\$859 million increase

\$618 million Foundation Aid.

ENDING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

91,495 – that’s the number of suspensions in New York State for the 2015-2016 school year according to the New York State School Report Card (the most recent data available). That’s more than 500 suspensions per day. Even children in kindergarten have faced suspension for typical age-level behavior.

The Safe and Supportive Schools Bill (A.3873a/S.3036a) is designed to reduce the over reliance on suspensions and promote alternative approaches to handling students misbehavior.

The Safe and Supportive Schools Bill will:

- Eliminate suspensions for students in grades K-3
- Limit the length of long term suspensions to 20 days, instead of 180 days
- School policies will limit law enforcement interaction with students
- Students will receive instruction when excluded from the classroom and will be purposefully reintroduced into the school community following a suspension

All schools, including charter schools, will be required to have discipline policies that are based in best practices developed by educational experts across the country.

ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW (APPR)

The 2015-16 state budget, enacted in March of 2015, included provisions that substantially altered the APPR system, including greater reliance on state standardized tests. The “test and punish” agenda meant schools, educators and students faced highstakes consequences tied to student test scores. The over reliance on standardized test scores creates an atmosphere where educators focus on teaching to the test instead of quality instruction. In December 2015, the Board of Regents voted to implement a four-year moratorium on the consequences of using the state’s grades 3-8 ELA and math assessment in APPR. The moratorium will expire at the end of 2018 if the New York State legislature doesn’t enact

significant changes.

Teachers learn best through collaboration, shared planning time and appropriate professional development. Instead of tying high stakes consequences to students test scores we should focus on creating supportive environments for teachers and students.

OPT-OUT

“...the Opt Out movement is a vital component of the Black Lives Matter movement and other struggles for social justice in our region. Using standardized tests to label black people and immigrants ‘lesser,’ while systematically under-funding their schools, has a long and ugly history in this country.”

—Seattle NAACP President Gerald Hankerson

Test refusal connects so many issues that affect public school students everywhere, but are felt hardest in poor communities of color. We do not have enough money to heat our schools or lower class size, but we somehow can pay for production and printing of tests, test prep material, scoring for tests, shipping the tests. We use the narrow metric of test scores to determine which schools to close, ignoring other ways these institutions may be anchoring or benefiting the community. Once the schools close they can be replaced by “no-excuses” charter schools which enforce a kind of rigid discipline which for many feels more like preparation for being an obedient worker drone than the training needed to be innovative leader.

We want students to spend their days learning, creating and debating, not preparing for test after test. Schools that serve more Black and Brown students have become test-prep factories rather than incubators of creativity and critical thinking.

Parents and students across the state need to be well informed of their ability to opt out of state test. The growing opt out movement has led to 225,000 students opting out of the 2017 state test.

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PRE-K

New York needs to fulfill its promise to provide full-day Pre-K for all 3- and 4-year-olds across the state. Instead of decreasing child care subsidies, we should be increasing support for children and families. High quality early childhood education creates long terms benefits for children, families and community. For every \$1 invested in early learning, taxpayers save \$7-\$11 in future cost. We need to invest in our youngest New Yorkers.

Where's My Pre-K?

New York State has been gradually expanding access for full day Pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds. A few districts like New York City and Rochester actually have universal Pre-K to serve all the 4-year-olds who wish to attend a full day program. Unfortunately, the majority of upstate and suburban districts have been left behind. School districts often offer half day Pre-K in an attempt to serve more children, but half day programs are only 2.5 hours, and it is difficult for working parents to transport their children to and from school in the middle of the day. Many districts also have waiting list because without enough funding from the state they cannot accommodate all the 4 year olds in district for Pre-K.

Governor Cuomo has stated repeatedly, "It is time for New York State to have universal full day Pre-K statewide." He promised a blank check for every school district that was willing and able to expand Pre-K, but universal Pre-K has yet to materialize in most areas.

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PRIVATIZATION

In today's political climate, it is important now than ever for local communities to build the power needed to control how education is administered in their communities. Our work is to build support for community-driven school improvement instead of failed school privatization schemes.

Charter schools and their management organizations; vouchers; virtual schools; and an alternatively certified, non-unionized teaching force are essentially capitalist ventures that enforce segregation. Black and Brown communities have to

deal with the disastrous impact of funneling public dollars into privately run charter schools.

Many charter schools, in particular the larger chains, suspend students at rates well in excess of their home-district averages. Charter school parents have gone on the record complaining that their children are repeatedly suspended, or subject to disproportionate punishments, until the family finally withdraws the child from the charter school.

High suspension rates, coupled with the fact that charter schools seldom enroll more students once others drop out, means that the test scores of many charters only reflect the achievement of the survivors who have endured a school's treatment. This results in unreliable data and exposes the self-acclaimed "high performing charter school" as a myth.

New York State needs to enact a five-year moratorium on new charter schools. The continuous decrease in funding for public schools in order to fund charter schools undermines the efforts of local school districts. With a five-year moratorium on new charters, we can stop hindering the success of school districts while continuing to support existing charter schools. During this time we need to collect hard data on public schools and charter schools. In five years, we will review the data and lift the moratorium if necessary, or accept that traditional public schools can and will educate our future workforce and leaders.

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

A community school is a public school — the hub of its neighborhood, uniting families, educators and community partners to provide all students with top-quality academics, enrichment, health and social services, and opportunities to succeed in school and in life. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone — all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

Community schools must be a collaboration between the neighborhood and the school community. With genuine buy-in and participation from all constituencies, a community school can build the strong partnerships that transform student achievement while also strengthening the entire

community.

New York State currently invests \$350 million in community schools.

We want strong community schools with curricula that are engaging, relevant and rigorous; support high-quality teaching and not high stakes testing; social, emotional, health and mental health services as well as wraparound supports for every child; student-centered school climate, and transformative parent and community engagement.

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

New York State is one of the most socioeconomically and racially diverse states in the country. For students to gain the full benefits of the diversity of our state, cultural awareness must be woven into daily classroom life. There is a clear demand from parents, students and educators to strengthen cultural responsiveness.

In broad terms, cultural responsiveness means creating instructional environments that propel learning by connecting new learning to each student’s background and prior experience. Cultural responsiveness is a commitment to practices that help all students use landmarks of their own culture to build knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

From an instructional standpoint, cultural responsiveness means making content accessible to students by teaching in a way that students understand. To do this, educational leaders must be able to relate aspects of students’ daily lives to the curriculum. If educational leaders value students’ cultural and linguistic background, then they and the members of their school staff will see students’ background as capital to build on, not barriers to student learning. Cultural responsiveness means using students’ personal interest as a basis for connecting content to the student’s personal experience. The aim is to improve the learning experience by enhancing student engagement. Cultural responsiveness advances and accelerates student learning by honoring and supporting students’ cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences.

- Work to ensure school and district staff represent the diversity of the New York student population; promote district-wide skills in culturally responsive education and anti-discriminatory

practices

- Provide classes, curricula, projects and resources designed to celebrate the rich diversity of New York students
- Cultivate a positive, culturally responsive culture in schools that respects and honors all youth regardless of race, culture, and abilities
- Champion increased parent engagement efforts that are culturally responsive and promote collaborative efforts to help students grow

CONCLUSION

Education justice requires adequate and equitably distributed funding for our public schools. It’s time to end the record inequality in education funding in New York that perpetuates a widening opportunity gap. New York’s students need New York’s leaders to invest in providing high quality public schools in every community. We need our elected officials to join the resistance and protect our public schools.

ABOUT AQE

The Alliance for Quality Education is New York state’s lead community-based organization in the fight for high quality public education. We are a coalition mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high quality public education to all students regardless of zip code. AQE helps to organize parents and community members in every region of the state, with staff located in Buffalo, Rochester, Capital District, the Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island.