



# **Education & Child Care**

## 2024 Candidate Briefing Guide

---

Alliance for Quality Education



## School Funding

Money matters; without adequate resources, schools cannot educate students. Research shows that the availability of resources closely correlates with student opportunities and outcomes. States that invest more in education see higher test scores, greater educational attainment, and higher earnings — especially for low-income students.

**To be equitable and adequate, school aid distribution must be based on student and school district needs — with more aid going to the school districts with the neediest students.**

In response to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, New York State created a formula, called the Foundation Aid formula, that 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. From 2008 until 2021, the state only partially funded the Foundation Aid formula. **September 2023 marked the first year that school districts across the state kicked off their school year with 100 percent of their Foundation Aid allocation.**

A new era has begun, prompting the need to update the formula to reflect demographic changes and current student needs.

### THE CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL EQUITY

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 was 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 a \$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. ([See timeline.](#))

## 1 Update the Foundation Aid Formula

The additional funding from the full implementation of the Foundation Aid formula is vastly improving educational equity, especially as compared to the past decade of underfunding which led to widening inequality. With this milestone, it is now time for the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to take a critical look at how the formula can be revised and improved.

The state has not significantly updated the formula in fifteen years, resulting in a formula that relies on outdated information and limited weights that fail to reflect students' evolving needs. The current Foundation Aid formula cannot account for the complete needs of high-need, majority Black and Latinx school districts. A more equitable version of the

## EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: A CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE

Although it leads the U.S. in average per pupil spending, **New York ranks 48th in educational equity among all states** by measure of the funding gap between the districts enrolling the most students in poverty and the districts enrolling the fewest, and ranks 44th by measure of the funding gap between the districts enrolling the most students of color and those enrolling the fewest.

The explanation for this gap lies in the way that New York's school districts depend on a combination of local property taxes and state aid for funding. Wealthy districts are able to vastly outspend poor districts, and the poorest and neediest students are unable to raise significant funds from property taxes and rely heavily on state aid.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report looking at education funding formulas, total spending and equity across schools in all states. The commission concluded that educational opportunity is the foundation for an equitable society. As such, it is a civil rights issue.

funding formula should respond to the needs of students in the 21st century, taking into consideration the challenges the pandemic brought as well as reflect advancements in school finance, current curriculum standards, and the values and needs of communities across New York State.

The funding formula needs updating through a thoughtful process and community engagement. Some

elements of the formula can be updated immediately. These are the use of the 2000 Census poverty data, the use of the need resource capacity from 2003 (this is a combination in income wealth and property wealth for residents in districts which determines how much local money each district can contribute to their schools), the use of Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) (many districts have enough poverty to be in the federal free breakfast and lunch program for all students so they do not collect FRPL data- community eligibility). These updates can and should happen in the next budget cycle as the Board of Regents and NYSED are working with experts and the community to study the formula in depth (starting with how much does it cost to educate students within the context of the 21st century and a post-pandemic world).

The New York State Education Department has requested \$1 million in state aid to cover the cost to fully update and revise the Foundation Aid formula.

## THE UPSHOT

**New York State must incorporate the requested \$1 million by the State Education Department into the 2024-25 state budget for studying revisions and updates to the Foundation Aid formula.**

## 2 Federal COVID Relief Funding for Schools Runs Out in 2024

When the pandemic shut schools down, the federal government took action and provided essential funding to address the needs of students. In 2020 and in 2021, the US government provided a total of \$12 billion to New York State public schools.

The majority of school districts used federal COVID relief spending for one-time costs, such as HVAC systems, infrastructure updates to address health and safety, technology and internet updates to ensure accessibility of remote instruction. But due to the decades that New York State had been underfunding its public schools, many districts also used the funds to add essential programs and supports that their students had lacked for years, centering the needs of their students in their spending decisions. Some districts implemented mentoring and tutoring programs to help students maintain the pace of learning; they hired social-emotional and trauma support personnel to address the trauma that students went through either by losing loved ones, getting sick themselves or by experiencing resource loss. They provided meals as many students' families slid into poverty. They attempted to hire more teachers to ensure smaller class sizes as the pandemic dictated, and educational research deems it as a successful strategy.

With that federal aid due to expire at the end of the 2023-2024 school year, school districts are struggling to figure out how to maintain these essential programs for their students. Unless federal or

state leaders provide additional funding, schools across the state will be forced to make major cuts. Some school districts, including New York City and Yonkers, have publicly raised the alarm about the budget shortfall they face and what the cuts will mean for students.

Districts should not now be penalized for spending federal funding on programs their students had long needed but lacked, due the state's chronic neglect of public education funding. The state must step up and continue to honor its obligation to provide public education that enables students to thrive.

Two things must happen when students are the center of the decision-making process for spending: the programs, personnel, and services they need must guide how much funding is necessary. The funding must come from the state in the form of on-going aid. This aid can be a category similar to textbook aid, or it can be an additional weight or category within the Foundation Aid formula.

### THE UPSHOT

**New York State must provide \$2 billion in funding in the 2024-25 budget to continue critical educational programs that are funded with expiring federal COVID relief funds.**



### 3 Addressing teacher and staff shortages

School districts across the state have struggled to recruit and retain educators and support staff, particularly recruiting BIPOC educators. “Grow your own” programs at some school districts help students become teachers, committed to teaching in their communities. However, one of the biggest incentives for the teaching profession — the offer of a good retirement and benefits — have been chipped away by austerity budgets in recent years.

To recruit and retain educators and support staff, and more specifically BIPOC educators and support staff, a two prong approach is needed:

- The state must provide incentives to young people to become educators such as loan forgiveness and a livable pension.
- Local school districts must create pathways for their students to go into the teaching profession by offering more college level classes at the high school, ensuring that BIPOC students are on track to be in those classes, creating “grow your own programs” and partnering with local colleges and community colleges to facilitate accelerated learning for these students.

#### THE UPSHOT

**New York must invest in recruitment and retention of educators and support staff, especially BIPOC educators and support staff.**

## School Climate

School climate is what makes a school welcoming. **A sustainable, positive school climate fosters young people’s development and learning**, and helps them become adults who are productive contributing members of our democratic society.

#### A positive school climate includes:

- Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe.
- People are engaged and respected.
- Students, families and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision.
- Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning.
- Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

#### Core components of a positive school climate are:

- Safety
- Interpersonal relationships
- Teaching and learning
- Social media
- Institutional environment

The New York State Commissioner of Education and New York State Attorney General identified that diversity, equity and inclusion lie at the core of a positive school climate. They identified the Dignity

for all Students Act and the Board of Regents' DEI policy as the two policies that must inform teaching and learning and student discipline. **These are crucial to a positive school climate.**

## 4 Solutions Not Suspensions Bill

There were 91,495 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 is more than 500 suspensions per day. Even children in kindergarten have faced suspension for typical age-level behavior.

The research is clear that suspensions and more policing does not increase safety or foster any kind of positive school climate.

**The Solutions Not Suspensions Bill (A.5691/ S.1040)** is designed to reduce the over-reliance on suspensions and promote alternative approaches to handling students' misbehavior.

### **The Solutions Not Suspensions 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 on best practices developed by educational experts across the country.

### THE UPSHOT

**New York must pass the Solutions Not Suspensions Act (A.5691/ S.1040) in the 2024-25 legislative session.**

## 5 Community Schools

Community schools are another strategy that helps foster positive school climate and student success.

A sustainable community school is a public school that is 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. Sustainable 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 require collaboration between the neighborhood and the school community. With genuine buy-in and participation from all constituencies, a community school can build strong partnerships that transform student achievement while also strengthening the entire community.

We want strong, sustainable 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.

New York State currently invests \$350 million in community schools, with \$250 million as a set aside within the Foundation Aid funding that schools receive.

The state must ensure that community schools have their own separate funding stream, in the form of categorical aid so that school districts can implement and maintain community schools effectively.

#### THE UPSHOT

**New York must continue its investment with \$100 million in categorical aid for community schools in the 2024-25 state budget.**

## 6 Culturally Responsive Education

Culturally responsive education is another component directly related to teaching and learning under the positive school climate umbrella.

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 family engagement efforts that are culturally responsive and promote collaborative efforts to help students grow
- **Ensure that teaching truth is at the core of teacher training and practice.** The anti-CRT (critical race theory) attempts are really about hiding pieces of the history of this nation in whitewashed covers. This must be rejected on all fronts

#### THE UPSHOT

**New York needs to embrace cultural responsiveness in New York's schools' curriculum, resources, and staff to engage students effectively and honor the diversity of its student population.**

## Early Care and Learning

Early care and education is a right, not a privilege. High quality early childhood education creates long terms benefits for children, families and community. It is an essential part of our early education system, and critical to our state's economy. For every \$1 invested in early learning, taxpayers save \$7-\$11 in future costs. We need to invest in our youngest New Yorkers.

## 7 Universal Child Care

New York State, like many other states, has a complicated funding system for programs and an even more complicated system for providing assistance to families. A combination of federal funds through the Child Care & Development Block Grant and state funds go to county administered child care assistance vouchers and reimbursements for providers. Child care programs are licensed and overseen by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS).

### What does universal child care mean?

**Universal child care** means access to high quality child care for *all* New York families; no means testing, no unreasonable barriers, and with special outreach and support for historically underserved children and families (including children with disabilities, immigrant families, Black and brown families, rural families, kin and foster families, families experiencing homelessness). All types of programs — encompassing home/family-based, center-based, school-based and legally-exempt programs — are respected, valued parts of the system, and funded based on the true-cost of providing high-quality care and learning. And all teachers are paid a thriving wage that rises with experience and credentials. The Empire State Campaign for Child Care, of which AQE is a core-leading group, is a statewide coalition fighting for universal child care.

Universal child care is good for the economy. There are few investments with a greater public return than child care, **estimated at 18 percent** by the Minnesota Federal Reserve. Unpaid family caregiving



sharply reduces parents' earnings, which in turn reduces the amount of tax revenue they generate. A [2023 ReadyNation report](#) on infant-toddler child care determined that families with children under 3 years lose an average of \$5,520 per working parent annually in lost earnings and in more time looking for work. Businesses also lose out due to productivity hits and the costs of turnover, an average of \$1,640 per working parent per year. New York cannot afford to continue to underinvest in child care.

The Child Care Availability Task Force, created in 2017 by legislative action, included educators, advocates, policy experts, legislators, and was chaired by then-Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul. While the Task Force's recommendations did not meet the definition of "universal," it brought us a step closer to universal child care. The task force has been reauthorized to oversee implementation of its recommendations.

New York made use of federal COVID relief funds to expand child care assistance. Since July 2022 an estimated 300,000 children have become newly eligible for child care assistance, making child care financially within reach for the first time for many families.

Despite these historic expansions to child care assistance, many barriers to access remain, particularly for immigrant families, for parents that work fluctuating hours or are part of the gig economy.

Immigration status bars some otherwise eligible children from child care assistance. As Governor Hochul looks to provide work permits to migrant workers, excluding their children from child care assistance programs is an unnecessary

barrier for families, and for the state's workforce shortage problem.

In addition, low wages paid to the child care workforce are worsening a severe child care, leaving many many families unable make use of the assistance because they cannot find a child care program that meets their needs with capacity to care for their child.

Child care workers in New York State—made up almost entirely of women and predominantly people of color—earn an average of **\$35,190**, less than 98 percent of all other professions. Child care educators also do not receive benefits, such as pensions and health insurance coverage.

**New York must ensure living wages for all who are in the child care workforce.** The small bonuses New York has provided to much of the workforce in recent years, while helpful, fall far short of the permanent hike in compensation the sector needs to stabilize and expand to meet growing need. To begin to address workforce challenges, New York must provide all members of the child care workforce a sustained increase in compensation with a permanent state child care fund.

#### THE UPSHOT

**New York must increase compensation and benefits for all members of the child care workforce, and ensure ALL New Yorkers can access child care, with a \$1.5 billion investment in the 2024-25 state budget.**

## 8 Pre-K

New York made great strides in recent years in fulfilling its promise to expand full-day pre-K to all 3- and 4-year-olds across the state. Pre-K programs are part of public education and are overseen by the State Education Department.

### Where's My Pre-K?

Today, most high need school districts in New York State have a pre-K program. A few districts, including New York City and Rochester, have truly universal pre-K, serving all the 4-year-olds who wish to attend a full day program. New York City has expanded its program to include some 3-year-olds as well.

Some school districts 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. Without adequate funding from the state, some districts cannot accommodate all the 4 year olds in the district for pre-K.

While all school districts are eligible for state funding for pre-K, there are two separate funding streams: one is formulaic, calculating the amount per child based on need and when the school district opted into the program; the other offers a flat \$10,000 per child for full day programs.

As a result, some high need school districts that implemented UPK programs early on are still receiving a lower rate per child than those that began their programs later. New York State needs to increase the rates, so that early adopters of the UPK program are not penalized,

facing an unfair fiscal burden to raise locally funding that other districts receive from the state.

In addition, the expansion of pre-K to more communities and the mixed delivery system (the law requires school districts to contract at least 10% of the funding with community based organizations) have placed child care programs and pre-K programs in direct competition. Pre-K is publicly funded with the funding going only to school districts which in turn contract with community based organizations. To be employed in a pre-K program, educators must be certified or be in a study plan to become certified overseen by a certified teacher. Pre-K educators often make much more than child care educators. The state created this problem by not investing adequately in the child care system, severely underpaying the workforce which pushes them out to other sectors or into pre-K. Also, because child care is unaffordable and assistance is hard to access, parents and families opt to send their kids to public free pre-K programs. The direct outcome is that instead of creating continuity of care and learning, the state is pitting educator against educator and program against program. The state must invest in child care and ensure that the two programs are complimentary, instead of adversarial.

### THE UPSHOT

**New York must continue its momentum in expanding pre-K with a \$100 million investment in the 2024-25 state budget.**