

Foundation Aid

The Foundation Aid formula needs to be updated this year to better reflect the needs of students today, and ensure that every child—regardless of their background or zip code—receives the education they are constitutionally entitled to, especially students experiencing housing instability, with special education needs, and English language learners.

The Governor's proposed changes to Foundation Aid adopted updates to the poverty data that were recommended by Rockefeller and the Board of Regents. Making those changes in isolation, without additional changes that were recommended such as updating the Regional Cost Index, would have a negative impact on some school districts. Twenty four school districts will see a less than expected Foundation Aid increase. Out of those 24, 16 are high needs urban and rural school districts, including New York City which will receive \$347 million Foundation Aid increase less than it was expected. This is a loss that is unacceptable and is sure to have an impact on students.

But at the same time, many other high need school districts in other parts of the state would receive a higher-than-expected increase under the Governor's proposed formula update, a very welcome adjustment.

While we welcome the Governor's effort to update the formula to more accurately capture students' realities, the changes must take into account the complex reality of each school district and must not jeopardize the well being of some students. Any changes to the Foundation Aid formula need to ensure that no district is adversely impacted by loss of funding.

With uncertainty surrounding federal education funding under the incoming administration, it's going to be up to our state leaders to protect New York's families, students and communities from any potential threat from the new administration in DC.

Commitment: Are you willing to commit to revising the Foundation Aid formula to address gaps, while ensuring no district is negatively impacted by changes in the 2025 budget?

East Ramapo

Here in New York, students have benefited from the increases in education aid in recent years, yet, public school students in East Ramapo continue to suffer the negligence and harm of underfunding.

Instead, the private interests of those who hold power have overtaken the interests of disenfranchised families, who no longer have a say in their own school community and children's education.

East Ramapo is a dramatic and real-time example of the road to privatization that comes from chronic underinvestment in one of our last remaining public goods — our public education system, which is there for ALL students, regardless of race, income, or immigration status.

East Ramapo's public school students are 96 percent Black and Brown, and more than half are English language learners. Eight in 10 students are economically disadvantaged. The district serves more homeless students than anywhere else in the region or in New York City — nearly 15 percent. Fifteen percent of students have disabilities.

With the needed public dollars not going to the public schools, the needs continue to pile up, with schools that have had lead in the drinking water for seven years, teacher and staffing shortages, and critical student needs that are going unmet. Student needs continue to grow, yet the schools have less and less every year to meet them.

We need to pass legislation to empower public school families in the district and address longstanding inequities, including crumbling infrastructure, a lack of bilingual educators, poor access to quality classroom instruction and materials, and financial mismanagement.

Commitment: Will you support incorporating the reforms contained in A10407 to empower East Ramapo's public school families, fix crumbling infrastructure, hire bilingual educators, ensure access to quality classroom instruction and materials, and end the systemic racism that defines school governance and finance?

Community Schools

Community schools are vital hubs providing holistic support for students and families, bringing together educational opportunities and community resources. These schools bolster academic performance and strengthen families and communities across New York State. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the urgent need for social-emotional and trauma-informed care, emphasizing the fragmentation in delivering comprehensive support to students.

Share a story of how your kids dealt with isolation and stress during the pandemic and how those impacts have lingered, an anecdote from a teacher or school staff member who witnessed the emotional struggles faced by their students during the pandemic, whatever the case, emphasize the long term impacts and resources needed to attend to them.

The integration of community resources and educational services within community schools is crucial for students' success, regardless of their zip code.

Do you support investing \$100 million to continue the expansion of community schools?

Solutions Not Suspensions

Hundreds of thousands of students are suspended from school across New York State every year. Last year, children in NYS lost 913,811 days of instruction because of suspensions, impacting 137,904 students

Suspensions do not improve behavior, but they do harm students, making them more likely to fall behind in class, disengage from school, fail to graduate, and even end up arrested or in prison

This is a racial justice issue, and a crisis of discrimination: students of color are suspended at higher rates, especially Black students, no matter what part of the state they live in. Research shows that vague categories like defiant or disruptive lead to students of color being suspended more often for the same behaviors as white students because of individual and systemic racism.

This is also a disabilities rights issue, students with disabilities are suspended more often than their general education peers

Low-income students are also at increased risk of suspension. For white students in particular, SED's own analysis demonstrates that coming from a low-income household increases the likelihood of suspensions.

Solutions Not Suspensions was first introduced in 2015. While we know many bills take years to pass, every year that we don't pass SNS, literally thousands of students are being pushed out of the classroom and we are allowing a blatantly discriminatory system to continue to punish our kids.

"I am a parent of X children, and our family has been personally affected by suspensions. I'd like to share my story with you. [insert story] This is why this bill is so personally important to me and my children."

The Solutions Not Suspensions bill would require public schools to use proven alternatives to suspensions, such as restorative justice, for minor infractions. It would also provide \$5 million for educator training to foster engagement and learning in the classroom.

Commitment: Will you commit to supporting the passage of the Solutions Not Suspensions bill (A118/S134) this session?

Child Care

High quality early childhood education creates long term benefits for children, families, and communities. It is an essential part of our early education system, and critical to our state's economy. The child care system in New York needs greater public investment to ensure care is accessible to all families who seek it and the vitally important child care workforce is paid a sustaining wage.

Caring for children means having educators that are well compensated so there is stability and continuity of care. Early childhood educators are vital to our communities, but they earn poverty wages. The child care workforce — 96 percent percent of which is women, and the majority women of color, earns less than 97 percent of all other professions. Many are forced to leave the child care workforce altogether for better paying jobs. [Include a personal story if you have one]

Solving the child care crisis starts with investments in the workforce to create more access for families. Without investments in the workforce, there will not be enough staff for new centers. We will not be able to create a substitute pool without paying our existing educators a living wage. More programs will close and more families will be left out.

Commitment: Will you invest \$1.2 billion to increase compensation for every member of the child care workforce so they have a significant boost of wages in order to continue to care and support children and families?

Parents can't afford to pay more for child care, but programs can't afford to charge less. All families in New York must be able to access child care assistance, starting with low income families.

We need to guarantee that families making up to \$100,000 (for a family of four) have child care assistance, even if county funding runs out, by ensuring that the state funds pay for this benefit. The state must increase funding for the Child Care Assistance Program by \$300 million to cover this cost.

Children with special needs must face NO barriers to accessing child care.

Commitment: Will you commit to making child care a state-funded right for families making less than 250% of the federal poverty threshold, and increasing reimbursement (enhanced) rates for children with special needs to be 30% above the market rate?

Pre-K

Pre-K and early care and learning programs are not only some of the most effective educational strategies for addressing inequality, they also are some of the best ways to ensure that parents and guardians can be part of the workforce.

For every dollar invested in early care and learning and pre-K, the return on investment is \$3 to \$7.

Not all children can access pre-K due to a lack of transportation, wraparound services, and, more importantly, the lack of adequate pay for teachers working in community-based organizations that contract with school districts to provide pre-K programs.

Pre-K functions as another grade in the education system, and should be funded as such. The state should move toward updating the per-student amount for pre-K based on the amount that each school district receives from basic operating aid (Foundation Aid).

By raising rates to at least \$10,000 per-child to all districts that need to implement pre-K, particularly for those districts who implemented pre-K decades ago and saw no increase since, the state can begin to ensure that children are put on a path of success early on.

Commitment: Will you invest \$25 million to continue the expansion of pre-K this budget?