



# SICKNESS, DEATH & CUTS

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19  
ON LONG ISLAND STUDENTS

**PUBLISHED JULY 2020**

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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 Long Island Progressive Coalition** is a grassroots community-based organization founded in 1979, dedicated to promoting sustainable development, revitalizing local communities, enhancing human dignity, creating effective democracy, and achieving economic, social and racial justice.

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LONG ISLAND STUDENTS

### INTRODUCTION

Long Island is one of the hardest hit regions from the COVID-19 pandemic. The reality is harsh but clear: Long Island's Black, Latinx and low-income children are at the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of pre-existing health disparities, limited community resources and chronically underfunded schools. The infection rates and death rates in Nassau and Suffolk county were amongst the highest in the state. The challenges of the novel coronavirus are being felt everywhere in Long Island, especially in our school communities. In addition to dealing with illness and grief, schools are grappling with how or if they should reopen. But, they are dealing with the additional expenses created by this pandemic with no additional aid to schools. In fact,

Governor Cuomo and the state legislature cut \$1.1 billion in state aid from schools in the 2020-2021 enacted budget. Long Island schools lost \$49.4 million in state aid. The federal CARES Act would have given our schools a much needed boost, but instead of increasing school aid in a time of crisis, funding was cut. Governor Cuomo and the state legislature created the Pandemic Adjustment formula that cut \$1.1 billion from New York's school districts with the highest concentrations of Black, Latinx and low income students. The Federal CARES Act funding was meant to give schools a much needed increase in the time of this crisis, but instead districts have not received any additional funding. The reality of COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the deep-seated inequities and racial disparities that have plagued New York State, and Long Island in particular. These disparities affect people in all aspects of their lives, from education to health care. It is shameful and immoral that Governor Cuomo and state leaders have chosen to balance the budget on the backs of Black, Latinx and low-income students.

## THE HARDEST HIT COMMUNITIES

Brentwood, represented by Senator Monica Martinez, has been among the communities hardest hit by COVID-19 (with the exception of the Shinnecock Indian Reservation and the very small community of Saltaire Village; for numbers look at the link in [Newsday](#)). Brentwood is the largest school district on Long Island. It is a low-income community, with 92 percent of its student population economically disadvantaged and 90 percent Black or Latinx. The students of Brentwood are now not only faced with the overwhelming trauma from the virus, but also with the devastating cuts the state has enacted as it used the federal dollars from the CARES Act that were supposed to help communities deal with the impact of COVID-19, to backfill the cuts. Brentwood essentially will not realize the intended effect of the \$4.6 million that the CARES Act allocated to its students. Instead, it saw an equivalent cut — Brentwood’s aid from the state was reduced by \$4.6 million — on top of the years of chronic underfunding, resulting in being shortchanged by \$142 million in Foundation Aid (basic operating aid). Brentwood is only one, among many communities, facing the gutting of its schools while dealing with the worse outcomes of this pandemic.

Central Islip, also represented by Senator Monica Martinez, is on the same trajectory as Brentwood, with more than 2,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Central Islip has the second highest cases per 1,000 people. With 90 percent Black or Latinx students and over 60 percent living in poverty, Central Islip finds itself in the epicenter of COVID-19 as well. It also did not benefit from the relief from the \$1,811,495 from the federal CARES Act funding, as it lost that much in school aid. Central Islip continues to be shortchanged by more than \$62 million in Foundation Aid.

The same is true for Westbury, represented by Senator Anna Kaplan, and Wyandanch, represented by Senator Phil Boyle, and the other high need districts on Long Island.

SCHOOL DISTRICT	FOUNDATION AID OWED FROM STATE (UNPAID 2019-20)	PANDEMIC ADJUSTMENT (CUT IN STATE AID)	FEDERAL CARES ACT	PERCENT BLACK & LATINX	PERCENT ECONOM. DISADVANTAGED	PERCENT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	PERCENT HOMELESS
HEMPSTEAD	\$78,924,630	-2,540,212	2,540,212	71%	75%	10%	22%
ROOSEVELT	\$31,092,247	-869,315	869,315	86%	80%	14%	4%
FREEPORT	\$42,338,862	-1,686,576	1,686,576	88%	67%	15%	2%
WESTBURY	\$32,788,362	-1,129,070	1,129,070	95%	87%	9%	1%
COPIAGUE	\$31,598,720	-1,223,715	1,223,715	79%	76%	14%	2%
AMITYVILLE	\$10,010,230	-816,891	816,891	87%	81%	14%	5%
WYANDANCH	\$22,672,600	-852,670	852,670	95%	90%	17%	5%
WILLIAM FLOYD	\$35,960,817	-2,250,912	2,250,912	47%	66%	15%	4%
BRENTWOOD	\$142,241,195	-4,601,976	4,601,976	89%	92%	14%	2%
CENTRAL ISLIP	\$62,233,674	-1,811,495	1,811,495	91%	59%	12%	3%

Last year, the Alliance for Quality Education joined with Senator Robert Jackson to tour school districts around the state with stops in Brentwood and Westbury. <sup>1</sup> Brentwood reported that because of the chronic underfunding of operating aid known as Foundation Aid, they had to cut the school day for high school students by one period and eliminate all elementary school librarians. They do not have enough social workers, school counselors, or school psychologists, after school transportation for elementary school students or enough programs for English Language Learners, even though one in three students is classified as such. When school buildings were closed because of COVID-19, Brentwood was not able to provide laptops or tablets to all students to engage in remote learning. Students will suffer from what has been aptly named “COVID-19 learning loss.” Districts are struggling to create plans for resuming learning in September, but the lack of resources and increased health and safety requirements makes it nearly impossible for the district to meet the educational, social and safety needs of its students.

COUNTY	SCHOOL DISTRICT	COVID-19 CASES	COVID-19 IMPACT	FISCAL STRESS (DESIGNATED BY THE NYS COMPTROLLER) <sup>3</sup>
NASSAU	HEMPSTEAD	2334	Among the hardest hit	Moderate Fiscal Stress
NASSAU	ROOSEVELT	663		Susceptible Fiscal Stress
NASSAU	FREEPORT	1722	Among the hardest hit	No Designation
NASSAU	WESTBURY	535	Hard hit	No Designation
SUFFOLK	COPIAGUE	855	Hard hit	Susceptible Fiscal Stress
SUFFOLK	AMITYVILLE	252		No Designation
SUFFOLK	WYANDANCH	739	Hard hit	Significant Fiscal Stress
SUFFOLK	BRENTWOOD	4474	Hardest hit community	No Designation
SUFFOLK	CENTRAL ISLIP	2119	Among the hardest hit	No Designation

In the communities hardest hit by COVID-19, students are asked to do more with the less. It is unjust for Black, Latinx, low-income and immigrant students to shoulder the brunt of the state's unwillingness to tax the ultra wealthy, while it makes deep cuts to education.

At Westbury Middle School, visitors in the spring of 2019 witnessed the extent of the overcrowding, requiring the principal to control foot traffic flow when students were switching classes. The middle school and high school are both overcrowded by hundreds of students. To accommodate all the students, the middle school's first lunch period starts at 9:25 a.m. Every inch of space is being utilized for instruction, including the principal's office and the school library. Ninth graders have to attend classes at a local community college. There are only five school counselors. Each counselor has a caseload of 320 students at the high school, instead of the recommended one counselor for 250 students. At the middle school, school counselors each serve 400 students. Classrooms also lack up-to-date materials, technology and resources. Westbury could only give out paper packets to students when buildings closed.

Now school districts are faced with hard decisions on how or if to reopen in September. Districts are grappling with tough questions that require adequate resources, resources that as mentioned above have been taken away from them. In the month of June, parents, young people, community members and educators from all across the state participated in ten community conversations to build a vision regarding a just reopening and just schools creating [The Roadmap to a Just Reopening and Just Schools](#). The top requirement for a safe and just reopening is to have adequate resources and adequate funding that allows for adequate personnel, space and supplies to keep both students and educators safe. Communities know that in order to be safe and learning, the new school year must include healing- and student-centered approaches. The voices of parents, students, educators and community members not only must be heard, but it must be included in the decision making process. To return to school in September, be it in person, virtually or a combination of the two, a clear, inclusive, transparent plan needs to be created for each locality, one that addresses the needs of the community first and foremost. A clear plan of how to ensure connectivity and access to online material with appropriate and updated hardware and training for teachers to ensure they are able to teach remotely. A plan that illustrates that priority is given to the students who have no alternative than to be in person or it is developmentally and educationally appropriate for them to be so, ensuring their safety and the safety of their teachers. A plan that addresses what happens in case there is need for closure again or someone falls sick. These are the considerations that every plan must address. And this requires funding and resources.

At a time when there has to be more investment in strategies such as community schools, districts are scrambling to make their budgets work. Community schools is a model that brings services from the community into the school, making it the center of where students access high quality academic programming, and their families also access services such as health and mental health providers, adult education programming, legal services and anything the community determines is needed. The model can also be implemented in a safe manner, within the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and the New York State Department of Health. The services that community schools offer can and should be accessed in a socially distant, safe way, such that allows families and the community to heal and continue growing.

In New York, where community schools have been implemented, many improvements have been reported in satisfaction with school, better health outcomes, and better academic outcomes for

students.<sup>2</sup> Students attend school more regularly, with fewer disciplinary incidents, and tend to graduate at higher rates. Community schools typically combine strong family and student engagement, strong academic programming, collaboration among community providers and the school, and collaborative leadership that engages both the parent and the teacher community. The community schools model is a strategy that can be implemented at any point the community collectively decides that it is necessary, conducts a needs assessment and plans what the school should look like. The community schools model seems uniquely positioned to meet those needs of students and their families during this unique time of crisis.

The question however remains: What is school going to look like in September? The governor's rolling budget powers allow him to make additional cuts to the state budget in the middle of the year. Governor Cuomo has already cut funding to high need schools districts totaling \$49.5 million for Long Island Schools. Now, he is threatening to make a 20 percent cut to school aid statewide. These school districts already have so much less. Long Island Senators need to stand up to Governor Cuomo and fight for their schools.

There are many bills in the state legislature aiming at raising revenue for education in order to avoid devastating cuts in times of crisis, especially since the [118 billionaires](#) currently residing in New York state are not only not hurting, but continue to make profits. The website [MakeBillionairesPay.info](#) lists 14 ways to tax the ultra wealthy to invest in our high need communities. One of the measures of note in the legislature include Senator Robert Jackson's bill (S7378) which would raise the income tax rate on the ultra wealthy in order to raise revenue specifically for public schools. Senator Jackson's bill could generate nearly \$4 billion in additional revenue annually with a small tax increase of 1-2 percent. This would provide our schools the much-needed revenue needed to help kids thrive in this moment, making cuts unnecessary and ensuring schools will be able to address the elevated needs that communities and young people and their families are facing.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 [http://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/equityreport\\_FINAL\\_digital.pdf](http://www.aqeny.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/equityreport_FINAL_digital.pdf)
- 2 <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/1/28/21121101/nyc-s-community-schools-program-is-getting-results-study-finds>
- 3 <https://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/fiscalmonitoring/lists.htm>