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## Long Island Coalition of School Superintendents

# 2017-18 Legislative Priorities A Sustainability Agenda

*Provide Predictable and Equitable School Funding*

*Support Shifting Student Needs*

*Develop Meaningful Teacher and Principal Evaluations*

*Fully Fund Future Mandates*

**NASSAU AND SUFFOLK WEBSITE ADDRESSES:**

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[www.suffolksuperintendents.org](http://www.suffolksuperintendents.org)

## A SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

### ***Provide Predictable and Equitable School Funding***

Public school districts across New York State are funded using a combination of federal and state aid and local taxes. Potential shifts in support for public schools coming from the federal government, unpredictable methodologies for allocating state aid to school districts, and shifting demographics have added challenges to the ability of local leaders to engage in long-term fiscal planning.

School district leaders on Long Island are thankful for three years of relatively strong increases in state aid, which have enabled some school districts to begin to restore services that were eliminated during years of reduced aid to schools through legislation, such as the Gap Elimination Adjustment. The elimination of the GEA and increased school aid have assisted school districts to provide required services to new students and in other cases allow for the restoration of services cut during lean times. However, the current system does not have a base formula that allows for future planning and/or reserves for high costs such as teachers' retirement obligations. In addition, the foundation formula is not predictable from year to year, which is a hindrance to long-term financial planning.

We advocate for the following changes which will allow school districts to develop predictable budgets while providing educational programs for all students.

#### **• *Teachers Retirement System (TRS) Reserve***

We recommend allowing school districts to establish a reserve for future Teachers Retirement System (TRS) obligations. We encourage support of the bill put forth during the 2017 legislative session (S.4563 – (Golden)/A.7353-A (Buchwald)) that passed in the Assembly.

The New York State Comptroller's 2010 report, covering five years of school district audits, recommended giving school districts more ways to place funds into reserve. School districts are limited to an unrestricted fund balance equal to no more than four percent of budgeted appropriations. Municipalities have no such limit, and the national Government Finance Officers Association recommends a 10 percent unrestricted fund balance for school districts. While municipalities are able to set aside funds for pension obligations on behalf of all of their employees, schools may do so only for the approximate 20 percent who are covered by the Employees Retirement System (ERS), not for the teachers and certificated administrators in the TRS. School districts, while not having this flexibility, are subject to more disclosure requirements and a tougher tax cap.

Reserves are still one tool left for school districts to exert some control over their financial future. We recommend giving schools access to reserves comparable to those already available to municipalities.

## ***2017-18 Important Fast Facts About Long Island Public Schools***

The needs of students educated in Long Island public schools have shifted as have the associated costs of the education that they need. Data regarding needs and costs is reflected in the facts below:

### **EVOLVING STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

- According to the New York State Student Data System's 2015-16 data, 13 percent of Long Island students are English language or multi-language learners.
- There is a higher percentage of "Newcomer ELLs" in Nassau and Suffolk counties (76.2 percent and 69.0 percent respectively), than in New York State as a whole (65.4 percent)
- Long Island has experienced a 29.4 percent increase in English language learners since 2007-08. A longer-range view is even more striking, as there has been a 336 percent increase in Long Island ELL enrollment since the 1991-92 school year.
- According to federal guidelines, more than 32 percent of the students enrolled in Long Island school districts qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. That is a 77.7 percent increase since the 2007-08 school year.
- Since 2007, there has been an 8.8 percent increase in the number of students with disabilities in Long Island schools, compared to a 3.7 percent increase statewide.

### **FINANCIAL AID INEQUITIES**

- Long Island has 38 low-wealth school districts (CWR <1.0), which enroll 45 percent (198,725) of the students in the region. These 38 school districts will receive an aggregate increase of \$58 million (4.5 percent ) in Foundation Aid.

### **FOUNDATION AID**

- Long Island's 34 high-wealth school districts (CWR >2.0) will receive only 4.2 percent of all state aid to the region, while enrolling 12.8 percent (56,549) of the students. Twelve of these school districts will receive less than 5 percent of their revenues from the state, while 19 others will receive between 5 percent and 9 percent. Only three of the 34 high-wealth school districts will receive more than 9 percent from the state.
- For the 2017-18 school year, total state aid to Long Island public school districts increased by \$129 million. Even with this increase, 11 Long Island school districts received less in state aid in 2017-18 than was received in 2008-09.
- On average, the total state aid makes up approximately 40 percent of the budgeted spending for Long Island's low-wealth school districts. The average for all Long Island school districts is approximately 25 percent.
- The New York State regional cost index needs to be considered in assessing the cost of education on Long Island. It is a fact that state aid dollars have less purchasing power downstate than in other regions of the state. The purchasing power of \$1,000 in the lowest cost regions is only \$702 on Long Island.

## ***Support Shifting Student Needs***

There have been well-documented increases in the number of students in Long Island school districts with shifting and more challenging needs. This is reflected in increases in the number of students who are English language learners; have had interruptions in their formal education; are living in poverty; and/or have special learning needs. Long Island schools have embraced these challenges and provide the required supports and services for these students, although this comes at a significant cost. Long Island continues to be seen as a high-wealth area with low-need students. The truth is, we receive less in state support per student than other parts of the state. Long Island's public school districts educate 16.1 percent of the state's students, yet will receive only 12.3 percent of the state aid. This is a difference of \$981 million for Long Island school districts. Our state aid per pupil is 26.7 percent LESS than the rest of the state (\$5,949 vs. \$8,113).

## ***Develop Meaningful Teacher and Principal Evaluations***

As school district leaders, we know that reliable assessment results are needed to improve education. We also know that multiple measures of assessment provide more reliable information about a student's performance than any individual assessment. During the past several years, we have worked within our communities to address the misunderstanding surrounding the grades 3-8 assessments. However, the percentage of parents who are choosing to opt their children out of state testing remains steady on Long Island. This is impacting an important source of information regarding how our schools are doing. The Every Student Succeeds Act includes an ongoing requirement for schools to meet the 95 percent participation rate for required assessments. In an effort to address the divide between the requirements and the lack of trust in the grades 3-8 assessments, we advocate for the following actions:

- Return the responsibility of evaluating teachers and principals to the local school board.
- Create a stakeholder group to revise 3012d in a timely manner.

## ***Fully Fund Future Mandates***

As school district leaders, we work diligently with our stakeholders to create and implement school budgets that are fiscally sound and responsive to the needs of our communities. We provide educational programs and services driven by complex laws and regulations. We are limited in the amount we can increase our budgets by the tax levy cap. With these constraints, it is imperative that any new mandates that are put into place for our schools and/or districts be subject to a full fiscal impact analysis prior to their implementation AND be fully funded. Any new mandates imposing new costs should not take effect until the next local fiscal year succeeding its adoption.

## ***• Tax Levy Cap Modifications***

To maintain the tax benefits of controlled school spending, while providing more effective multi-year financial planning by schools, we recommend the following:

Make the tax levy cap a fixed two percent, not an amount tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This lack of predictability makes it difficult for school districts to plan and is confusing to taxpayers. The base for New York State's tax cap has been below two percent for four consecutive years.

We encourage support of the bill put forward during the 2017 legislative session (S.2122 (O'Mara)/A.1841-A (Morelle)) related to the tax levy cap and payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT). This bill makes a technical adjustment to the property tax cap by clarifying that properties under PILOT agreements are to be included in a school district's tax base growth factor, as part of the tax cap calculation. This bill removes the permissive nature of the 2015 version and requires the adjustment to be made, rather than permitting the Department of Taxation and Finance to make its own administrative adjustment.

We also encourage support of the bill put forward during the 2017 legislative session (S.4283 (Murphy)/A.5965 (Galef)) making a technical adjustment to the property tax cap by clarifying that a school district's costs related to BOCES capital be treated in the same manner as a district's own capital costs, which are excluded from the tax cap calculation. This bill removes the permissive nature of a 2015 version of the same bill.

## ***• Foundation Aid Formula***

We strongly encourage the continuation of the Foundation Aid Formula. A significant public policy accomplishment was having a predictable formula to drive foundational aid to schools. It generally drove the greatest aid to the school districts that needed it the most. It also allowed for much needed predictability. It is clear that elements of the Foundation Aid Formula need to be updated, including the weightings to account for pupil needs, and the amount needed to prepare students for success. Updating the formula is essential, since the formula, as it stands now, does not work for many school districts. However, having something that resembles the Foundation Aid Formula as a cornerstone to a school finance system will facilitate more effective multi-year planning. As evidenced by the graphs and charts included here, Long Island school districts, particularly low-wealth districts, have received significantly less foundation aid than promised.

# FO FOUNDATION AID AID

## NASSAU COUNTY

Nassau County	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Total
Received	558,947,288	598,503,736	598,554,686	598,939,067	598,941,483	604,652,585	606,398,175	621,545,010	632,232,810	644,158,695	678,527,542	6,741,401,077
If fully funded	722,710,261	697,707,247	780,159,344	778,789,543	879,035,201	879,618,541	960,887,919	928,042,421	1,006,762,925	1,015,050,547	1,045,063,064	9,693,827,013
Difference	-163,762,973	-99,203,511	-181,604,658	-179,850,476	-280,093,718	-274,965,956	-354,489,744	-306,497,411	-374,530,115	-370,891,852	-366,535,522	-2,952,425,936

## SUFFOLK COUNTY

Suffolk County	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	Total
Received	1,145,445,950	1,196,258,077	1,197,742,958	1,197,825,014	1,198,355,314	1,207,089,864	1,210,693,134	1,230,841,025	1,244,269,295	1,259,908,830	1,304,486,222	13,392,915,683
If fully funded	1,369,005,170	1,252,842,261	1,341,766,618	1,372,540,296	1,488,809,464	1,495,310,087	1,578,449,433	1,566,422,565	1,594,088,493	1,629,300,499	1,679,561,656	16,368,096,542
Difference	-223,559,220	-56,584,184	-144,023,660	-174,715,282	-290,454,150	-288,220,223	-367,756,299	-335,581,540	-349,819,198	-369,391,669	-375,075,434	-2,975,180,859
Two County Total												-5,927,606,795

Data Sources:

- 2017-18 Property Tax Report Cards - NYSED Office of Management Services (Enrollment and Budgeted Spending)
- 2017-18 Combined Wealth Ratios – Legislative State Aid Runs – NYSED State Aid Office (Note: No CWR is reported for Little Flower UFSD, New Suffolk Common SD, Sagaponack Common SD, and Wainscott Common SD)
- 2007-08 through 2017-18 Legislative State Aid Runs – NYSED State Aid Office
- Foundation Aid History – Questar III – State Aid and Financial Planning Services

# FO FOUNDATION AID AID PER PUPIL HISTORY

