

Syracuse Foundation Aid Roundtable

Every year, instead of funding the Foundation Aid formula, New York legislatures substitute a temporary formula that leaves our schools underfunded and our Black and Brown students feeling the impact. The state calls this temporary funding formula Foundation Aid, but it is a poor substitute for the real Foundation Aid formula. Under true Foundation Aid our schools would be receiving \$4 billion more than they are.

The New York Civil Liberties Union is the foremost defender of civil rights and civil liberties in New York. We have more than 200,000 members and 8 offices around the state. Our Central New York Chapter covers Onondaga, Madison, Oneida, Seneca, Oswego, Cortland and Cayuga counties.



125 Broad Street
19th Floor
New York NY 10004
(212) 607-3300
nyclu.org

Donna Lieberman
Executive Director

Robin Willner
President

The NYCLU's education work focuses on two goals: 1) protecting and expanding civil rights and racial equity in institutions that serve young people, and 2) ensuring public schools live up to their promise as incubators of democracy. We are concerned with issues of school discipline and pushout, school climate and student supports, the opportunity gap for students of color, culturally responsive and affirming educational environments, and access to adequate supports for English Language Learners and students with disabilities. While the challenges for students of color and students with disabilities in NY schools are myriad, nearly all of would be eased by a fair, adequate, and equitable funding plan.

The Syracuse City School District specifically is owed more than \$45 million under the Foundation Aid formula, which would account for approximately 10% of its annual budget, or \$2,111 per student. North Syracuse is owed \$11m, East Syracuse \$4.7m, and Utica \$47m.¹ Many schools across our state are strapped for cash, but urban districts, which educate the greatest proportion of students from poor households, are hit the hardest. These districts serve the children with the most intense needs and generally have less funding from local sources.

We call on the state legislature to fully fund the Foundation Aid formula in 2020. Currently, the amount owed by the state to our schools is \$4 billion and almost 2/3 of that is owed to districts with majority students of color. This should be the primary focus of the State Legislature this year.

Further, in the 2021 session, we call on the legislature to improve on and update the Foundation Aid Formula to better account for high-needs students, including English Language Learners (who make up more than 15% of the student body in Syracuse) and students with disabilities (more than 20%).² **If fully funded by the state, the Syracuse School District could invest in, among other things, support services for students designed to increase school success and reduce absenteeism and classroom dysfunction.**

Example: School Discipline and the School to Prison Pipeline

In schools with too few behavioral and classroom supports, teachers sometimes rely on suspensions and police interventions to maintain discipline, which has a

¹ Alliance for Quality Education, What is My School District Owed? <https://www.aqeny.org/school-district-owed/>

² US DOE Civil Rights Data Collection 2015-16

devastating and disproportionate impact on students of color. In the 2015-16 school year, the Syracuse City School District referred more than 60 students to the police and had a suspension rate of 22% (29% for Black students). For comparison, New York City had a suspension rate that year of just under 4% (7% for Black students).³

SCSD employs just 40 school counselors⁴ for a student body of approximately 20,000, a ratio of 500 students to each counselor, compared to the recommended ratio of 250:1.⁵ The district employs 50 social workers, again far from meeting the recommended 250:1 ratio.⁶ The District works with several different community partners to provide clinical mental health supports, youth advocates, behavioral supports and social/emotional development in its school buildings, but these programs operate on a shoestring budget, may not be stable year-to-year, and have double-digit staff numbers to support all 21,000 students in the district.⁷

When they have a reasonable caseload, guidance counselors and social workers can help ensure the needs of the whole student are met—academic and otherwise—reducing the burden on classroom teachers to meet students’ needs and manage the classroom. These supports can keep kids from being suspended, arrested, and removed from their regular learning environment.

Example: School-Based Health

The Syracuse City School District has 8 school-based health centers for 34 schools. In a district where more than three-quarters of students live in low-income households⁸, access to health supports in school can make the difference between chronic absenteeism and success. Syracuse residents have higher-than-average rates of asthma and lead poisoning compared to most of the rest of New York, two health challenges that hit children especially hard and can have an extremely negative impact on children’s ability to attend and succeed in school.⁹ In 2018, SCSD had to take \$6m in funding out of its general operating costs to pay for community school programs that offer health and other supports to students and families. The district previously used state grants for those programs, which is not a reliable source of funding for such an important program. Again, community school programs are a key difference-maker for kids from low-income communities.

³ Id.

⁴ Syracuse City School District, Counseling and Guidance Services, <http://www.syracusecityschools.com/districtpage.cfm?pageid=855>

⁵ American School Counselor Association, State-By-State Student-Counselor Ratio Report, 2015, <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf>

⁶ Student Support Services

<http://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder607/Student%20Supports%20Board%20Forum%20Final%20After%20Forum%2Epdf>

⁷ Syracuse City School District, Supports for Students: Mental Health, Academic & Social/Emotional, 2018,

<http://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder607/Student%20Supports%20Board%20Forum%20Final%20After%20Forum%2Epdf>

⁸ Syracuse City School District, Supports for Students: Mental Health, Academic & Social/Emotional, 2018,

<http://www.syracusecityschools.com/tfiles/folder607/Student%20Supports%20Board%20Forum%20Final%20After%20Forum%2Epdf>

⁹ Onondaga County Health Department, Onondaga County Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan, 2016-2018, <http://www.ongov.net/health/documents/OnondagaCountyCHA-CHIP.pdf>