

## **RECTIFYING THE INEQUITIES: DATA ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATURE'S ONE-HOUSE BILLS**

Each of the one-house bills that the Senate and the Assembly proposed last week would help to remedy many of the inequities in school funding created by the governor's executive budget—[inequities that particularly affect school districts that serve the state's most vulnerable children](#). It is critical that the final budget not shortchange any of these districts.

The governor's change in the method for counting students in poverty for purpose of state education aid has detrimentally affected high-need urban districts including New York City and the other "Big Five plus" urban districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, Albany, Utica, and Mount Vernon). The Senate has proposed an increase in the Foundation Aid formula's Regional Cost Index (RCI) that would help offset this inequity for New York City (\$288 million) and Yonkers (\$25 million, but would provide no benefits for any of the other Big 5 plus districts.

The Assembly has proposed a change to the RCI that would provide smaller increases to New York City (\$199 million) and Yonkers (\$5.3 million), but would aid Syracuse (\$3.7 million) and Utica (\$4 million), although none of the other Big 5 plus districts would benefit from the Assembly's RCI approach. (The Assembly version would, however, also benefit districts in Long Island, the Southern Tier, and the Mohawk Valley.)

The Assembly also proposes to increase from .50 to .65 the weighting for English Learner (EL) students in the Pupil Needs Index of the Foundation Aid formula. That change would provide New York City with an additional \$148 million, and Yonkers an additional \$3.6 million, while also increasing funding for Buffalo (\$10 million), Rochester (\$6.7 million), Albany (\$1.8 million), and most of the other Big 5 plus districts by analogous amounts. Other districts with large numbers of EL students, especially in the Lower Hudson Valley and Long Island, would also benefit from this change.

The Assembly would also rectify a longstanding injustice in the formula by reducing the floor used to calculate the combined wealth ratios of low-wealth districts. Poor small districts like Dover, Pine Bush, Port Chester, and Uniondale would benefit most from this change.

To ensure equitable funding for the high-needs urban and other school districts disadvantaged by the governor's proposal, the final budget bill should combine the most helpful features of both the Senate and the Assembly versions. This would mean adopting the RCI increases for New York City and Yonkers in the Senate version together with the RCI increases for other regions in the Assembly version. The EL adjustment in the Assembly version should also be adopted in the final budget.<sup>1</sup>

In April, once the budget is adopted, work should begin immediately to develop a comprehensive new school funding formula that will address current education needs throughout the state in a fair, systematic manner. The political wrangling over piecemeal changes in the grossly outdated Foundation Aid formula that has dominated the present budget process is unreasonable and unconstitutional and must be avoided in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> New York City's state aid would be increased by \$440 million under this scenario. That amount would more than compensate for the detrimental impact of the poverty count change, but it would still not cover the additional costs that the City will incur this year in responding to the state's unfunded class size mandate.