

February 7, 2017

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Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins – scousins@nysenate.gov
Assembly Member Thomas J. Abinanti – abinanti@assembly.state.ny.us

Dear Elected Representative:

As a voter and firm supporter of public education, I commend you and your colleagues for ending the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) last spring, which enabled my school district – for one – to stay within a very limiting tax levy cap.

However, while ending the GEA was an important step in last year's budget development, our school district is still underfunded by \$2,082,372 and we have lost over \$9 million in state foundation aid over the past five years. In adjustments to prior years according to the Statewide School Finance Consortium we have not been paid \$228,802 minus building aid. The increase in aid to the Ardsley UFSD over the 8-year period since the creation of Foundation Aid has only been \$11 per student! This is unsustainable and has placed a great deal of the burden on local property owners, myself included.

In order to provide adequate, equitable, sustainable and stable funding for our schools, it is critical that the current school financing structure be reformed. The major district cost drivers/expenditures are not controlled by local Boards of Education. They are unfunded or underfunded mandates, and are not addressed via the state's basic Foundation Aid formula or compatible with the near zero Tax Levy Cap.

New York State has not lived up to its constitutional obligation and legal support for public schools as articulated via the establishment of the Foundation Aid formula:

- The Formula does not address the high cost of living in this area. Our regional costs are very high in comparison to other parts of the state.
- The Formula uses a simplistic average called the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) to determine need. Since one expensive parcel of land or a lottery winner can throw off the average, the formula should incorporate the median CWR to better measure need.
- The Formula uses 16-year-old data from the 2000 census to measure poverty and doesn't reflect the underreporting of poverty in our area as recently reported by the United Way's ALICE Project ([UnitedWayALICE.org/New York](http://UnitedWayALICE.org/NewYork)).
- The Formula has not adjusted for the supports and new requirements added to address the needs of our recent and vulnerable immigrants. Success for these students is critical to our communities and our state, therefore the weightings in the formula assigned to our English Language Learners must be increased.
- The Formula has not adjusted for the ongoing commitments made to our students with disabilities. The state and the federal government must make good on their promise to our children with special needs by increasing the Foundation Formula weightings for our students with disabilities.
- The Foundation Aid Formula's Adjusted Foundation Amount (AFA) must be based upon real, current student costs.

I call on you and your colleagues to distribute state aid through an equitable funding formula with built-in annual adjustments that provides essential resources and services to all students, complies with New York's constitution, and meets statutory and regulatory requirements.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these matters. I look forward to following their implementation.

Name
Address