



**City School District of Albany
2021-22 Legislative Priorities
Equitable Foundation Aid Funding**

New York has made progress in recent years improving the equitable distribution of state aid to school districts. The focus that Governor Cuomo and the Legislature have placed on providing additional fiscal assistance to high-needs school districts like the City School District of Albany is commendable – and the right thing to do for students and families statewide.

However, while we recognize the severe impact that COVID-19 is having on the state’s ability to support all schools statewide, the Foundation Aid formula continues to be inequitable and, without significant reform, will continue to lead to disparities between districts. In a challenged economic environment like the one we are in, addressing those disparities is more critical than ever to minimize the impact on school districts and communities that already struggle with the impacts of poverty. In Albany, our students present with unique challenges and many fewer financial resources at home. To deliver equity, high-needs districts need the resources to provide the wraparound services, small class sizes and support staff our students need to succeed. We urge our state leaders to focus on equity both through the evaluation of school aid for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 fiscal years, and by re-evaluating the Foundation Aid formula.

Equitably fund high-needs districts

We ask that you ensure that all school districts receive a minimum of 85% of what the formula indicates for 2021-22 and put in place a multi-year plan to equitably fund all districts based on student need. Even with the state’s focus on high-needs school districts in recent years, Albany receives only about 75% of the funding that the Foundation Aid formula indicates we should receive. That missing 25% has meaningful impacts on our ability to provide needed services to our students without further burdening our property taxpayers.

As you can see in the table below, Albany receives only 45% of our annual funding via state aid, compared to higher percentages for other New York districts that serve similar student populations. Albany receives the fewest dollars of state aid per student of any of these similarly situated districts.

District	% Black and Hispanic students	% ENL students	% Special Ed students	2020-21 budget	% 2020-21 budget from state aid
Utica	45	17	16	\$ 186,643,034	81
Troy	48	3	17	\$ 113,651,375	59
Schenectady	52	5	18	\$ 204,653,930	69
Syracuse	63	18	21	\$ 449,919,845	79
Albany	64	12	13	\$ 261,568,188	45
Buffalo	66	18	23	\$ 954,700,000	77
Newburgh	75	15	16	\$ 287,432,600	57
Yonkers	77	13	18	\$ 641,247,726	51
Poughkeepsie	85	12	18	\$ 104,466,005	66
Rochester	87	16	22	\$ 927,587,824	70

Pay particular attention to the Capital City

As the Capital City, Albany should be an example of New York's excellence. But the City School District of Albany is challenged in two ways that make us unique and result in part from our role as host to state government:

- First, more than 60% of our city's property is tax-exempt. This means the remaining properties have to bear a high burden of tax impact. We appreciate the state's continued support of the City of Albany through the Capital City Aid, and ask that the state also recognize the impact on the city's school district.
- Second, in part because we are host to state government, we have been a center of charter school activity. This has resulted in an oversaturation of charter schools in Albany – both the number and percentage of charter students in our city are among the highest in the state. As a result, our annual charter school costs exceed \$35 million.

Despite this, and despite our low state aid ratio, our school district has held the line on property taxes. Over the last seven years we have had an average levy increase of only 1.03% per year, including two years with zero increases. Nonetheless, Albany's property taxes continue to be higher than suburban communities in our region. We are doing our part to bring property taxes in line, while delivering an excellent education to our high-needs population. We need the state's assistance to equitably finance the education our students need and deserve while keeping our tax burden reasonable so that the city can remain an attractive place to live and raise a family.

Other factors that impact Albany

Additional factors that are unique to our school district and present both fiscal and programmatic challenges are:

- **ENL growth** – The impending leadership change at the federal level is likely to mean many changes in policy and practice for our country. A lifting of the strict limits on immigration that have been in place under the current administration is likely to be among those changes, and possibly as soon as January. This could lead to a significant increase in the number of refugee and immigrant families moving to Albany, which is designated as a federal resettlement city. Our school district's population of ENL students more than tripled under previous federal immigration policies and currently comprises about 12% of our total student enrollment. We are anticipating similar growth in the years ahead.
- **Overall enrollment growth** – Our school district was among the state's fastest-growing school districts in New York from 2012-17, according to the State Education Department. During that period of time our enrollment grew by 16 percent, or approximately 1,300 students. While that growth has levelled off over the last three school years, particularly due to changes at the federal level regarding immigration, we anticipate that changes to immigration policies in the new administration could lead to overall growth in our student enrollment once again while most districts in New York continue to experience decreases.
- **Justice reforms** – We ask that you continue to consider the unintended consequences of the state's recent justice-related reforms. These reforms have been the right thing to do, and our district fully supports them. However, even before the COVID-19 crisis they left districts like ours lacking the resources necessary to provide the additional academic, social-emotional and mental health supports for 16- and 17-year-olds who would previously have been adjudicated as adults, and are now being supervised in the community and continuing to attend school. While we fully support raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18, we urge the state to provide school districts with additional funding to provide the critical supports teen-agers need – especially in the time of a worldwide pandemic that is magnifying the need for social-emotional and mental health supports throughout society.