

Democratic Rural Conference of New York State

PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING IN NEW YORK STATE: INSUFFICIENCY AND INEQUALITY

The DRC urges restoration of \$5.9B over four years to school districts through a combination of adding money to Foundation Aid and elimination of the Gap Educational Assessment (GEA). It further requests that the School Funding Formula (SFF) be adjusted to accurately reflect the disparities in the Combined Wealth Ratios (CWR) of our School Districts. The DRC has a particular interest in rural school districts, many of which are “high - need” entities.

SUFFICIENCY: The current funding situation flies in the face of the 1997 Campaign for Fiscal Equity settlement intended to close the educational gap. The settlement formula required an addition of \$5.5B in Foundation Aid. Currently the State is \$4.9B behind in Foundation Aid and \$1B in GEA.¹ Clearly this insufficiency has worsened.

EQUALITY: The SFF prioritizes high need school districts in order to achieve the constitutional obligation to provide every student with a sound basic education. Nevertheless, the current formula would owe 2.3 times more of the proposed funding addition to wealthy schools than to high - need school districts. Overall, high - need rural districts are short \$334M (Foundation Aid plus GEA).² Clearly, the inequality in the State's provision of educational services is not adequately addressed by the current SFF.

Citizens in low CWR counties cannot pay the needed taxes to achieve equity. The only alternatives their school districts have are to make additional cutbacks in staffing and services and/or dip into reserves. For several years school districts have already taken these steps. They cannot continue on this path and produce students educationally ready as employees and as citizens.

A report from the New York State Comptroller shows that six of the school districts in DRC counties are under “Significant Stress”; nine are under “Moderate Stress”; 31 are “Susceptible to Stress.” Since each year we continue under the current SFF only exacerbates the inequity, we are clearly headed in a direction of increasing devastation for many of our schools, a tragic waste of human potential. We can do better. This is reversible.

The Board of Regents is entrusted with awesome responsibility of “the maintenance and support of a system of common schools, wherein all the children of the state may be educated.” We, therefore, ask your help for all New York's children, with prioritization of funding to high - need school districts including those that are rural. We recognize the governmental and political context in which you must operate. We ask you to use your considerable influence and power to provide New York's children, including its rural children, educational access to equal opportunity.

1 Billions Behind Report prepared by Marina Maraco O'Malley, Policy Director, Alliance for Quality Education

2 Ibid.