



Testimony for the State Senate 's Foundation Aid Hearing (Revised)

Tom Sheppard to: schwartz

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Cc: "Kim Famous"

Hi Ms. Schwartz,

I'm sorry. There is a single revision to my testimony that I made below. Autocorrect took one "p" out of my last name. I am sending you the corrected version in this message.

Regards,

Thomas Sheppard
Parent Member
Community Education Council District 11

Good morning. My name is Thomas Sheppard. I wanted to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am here as the father of 3 kids that attend NYC Public Schools, PTA President of one of those schools, elected member of the District 11 Community Education Council, which serves roughly 37,000 K-8 students in the northeast section of the Bronx, and an Education Advocate to address inequity in school funding, particularly Foundation Aid.

For almost a decade and a half, New York State has not fulfilled its obligation to fully fund Foundation Aid. As a result, our children are STILL not receiving the sound quality education they have a right to. We generally agree that education is the key that unlocks the door to opportunity. But sadly, many families in my district have been given a broken key that doesn't fit that door. For many years we have been hearing how important education is while the schools in my district and across this city and state are continuously underfunded, with overcrowded classrooms, not enough highly qualified teachers, and plagued with crumbling, unsafe, and inadequate infrastructure. Principals STILL have to choose between hiring general education, special education, or multi language teachers, and those teachers STILL do not have the resources they need like textbooks and supplies. There are schools in my District without libraries, guidance counselors, or after school programs. There are schools in my District where the population of Students In Temporary Housing is roughly 25%.

We have all been asked to more with less. How that plays out in my district is that inadequate funding creates an environment where less than a third of our students are proficient in ELA and Math and where only 10 percent of Students with Disabilities, Students in Special Education, Students with IEPs or English Language Learners are proficient. The reality is there is only so much more you can do with so much less before the whole thing breaks down. And I am here as a witness to that reality in the Bronx.

Statewide, the schools with the most needs have been shortchanged by over \$4 Billion. For example, schools in District 11 alone are owed nearly \$15 million dollars. I know this may be oversimplifying a really complex situation, but if I calculate an average base teacher salary of \$75K, and then consider that \$15 million in Foundation Aid is owed to District 11, that equals 200 teachers. I'm sure EVERY District Superintendent in the NYC Department of Education could dramatically reduce classroom sizes with an additional 200 teachers on the payroll in each of their districts. Also, at \$100K each, \$15 million represents about 150 after school programs we could add in our district. As a District, we would no longer have to continue to starve our schools with the most need and rob our most vulnerable kids of the education they rightfully

deserve simply because of money.

I do not believe Foundation Aid formula isn't broken. I believe it simply hasn't been funded properly. I am disappointed that my community has to watch the State continuously underserve us year after year and decade after decade. Why are we even having a conversation about fixing something that's never been fully implemented or funded? I'm going to borrow a line that I heard at the Foundation Aid hearing in Bayside last month. How do you know if a car is working or not without putting gas in it or how far it can go without a full tank? Before we go there, New York State must honor the agreement it made as part of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity vs. The State of New York. It's time to give our children the Education they have a right to and richly deserve and fully fund Foundation Aid.

Thank you.