

**EdTrust-New York**  
**Elementary Education/Secondary Education Budget Testimony**  
**January 29, 2025**

Hello, my name is Arlen Benjamin-Gomez, and I am the Executive Director of EdTrust–New York. Ed Trust–New York is a statewide policy and advocacy organization that seeks to close opportunity gaps that keep too many students from reaching their full potential, especially students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx students, and those from low-income backgrounds. Our work is data-driven and student-centered, and we work in partnership with civil rights, education, parents, nonprofit and business organizations across the State.

I appreciate the opportunity to share this testimony with members of this committee as you consider the 2025-2026 State Budget. As an organization committed to pursuing equity in education, our work focuses on ensuring policies, structures, and systems exist so that all children are equipped with the skills and resources necessary to be successful in whatever paths they may choose for college or career and beyond.

EdTrust-New York’s 2025 policy agenda is premised on the belief that all children can succeed in school when provided with high-quality, culturally relevant instruction and support that is equity-driven, data-centered, and student-focused. To improve outcomes across the state for students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx, and students from low-income backgrounds, EdTrust-New York advocates for an equitable system of education that helps schools meet the following milestones:

- Every child is prepared for kindergarten success;
- Every student is proficient in reading by the end of third grade, and receives instruction aligned to the science of learning from an effective, diverse educator workforce that provides the foundational math and reading skills necessary for success in high school and beyond;
- Every high school student has access to advanced coursework, college in high school opportunities, a meaningful diploma that signifies successful preparation for college and career, and is provided with the information, support, and financial aid needed to enroll in and complete college or postsecondary training; and
- Every child benefits from an equitable system of funding and support that targets resources to the districts and schools that need it the most, monitors student progress, and collects data to track student outcomes from cradle to career.



## **Executive Budget Proposal**

The Governor's 2025-26 Executive Budget includes some steps to address these milestones and EdTrust-New York supports the inclusion of the following proposals in the Legislature's final enacted budget:

### **College in High School**

EdTrust-New York applauds the Governor for the creation of a College in High School Opportunity Fund in the Executive Budget. The Governor's plan adds \$12.2 million to existing funding to support opportunities for high school students to receive early college credits. We are pleased that the funding includes policy alignment to define these important programs, targets funding to help students from low-income backgrounds participate in these programs, and ensures data collection on their impact. While this is an important investment, we hope this marks the first of many future investments aimed at expanding access to these programs for high school students, particularly Black, Latinx and Native American students as well as those from low-income backgrounds, statewide.

### **State Longitudinal Data System**

EdTrust-New York welcomes the Governor's support for a statewide longitudinal data system, including the development of a data governance board to help ensure student privacy. This data system will help policymakers target resources while supporting families throughout their educational journeys.

### **Universal School Meals**

EdTrust-New York supports the Governor's proposal for free universal school meals, which will eliminate the stigma of free meals, and increase access for all students from low-income backgrounds to healthy food.

## **Executive Budget Concerns**

The Governor's 2025-26 Executive Budget does not include the following important equity-focused proposals supported by EdTrust-New York:

### **Early Literacy and FAFSA Completion**

EdTrust-New York is disappointed that the Governor's budget proposal does not build on last year's investments in literacy and universal FAFSA completion.

### **Foundation Aid Formula**

Additionally, we are concerned by the Executive Budget's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula. While we generally support updates to the way poverty and free-and-reduced-price lunch are calculated in the formula, the proposed changes are not aligned with the Rockefeller Institute's recommendations which accounted for concentrations of poverty, a key recommendation that EdTrust-New York advocated for. As a result, the proposed changes do not address the many outdated and archaic flaws in the Foundation Aid formula.



We are especially concerned that the change included in the Executive Budget for how poverty is measured will lead to a significant funding decrease for New York City Public Schools. Because the Rockefeller study did not model any of their recommendations, we have no insight into the impact this proposed change will have on districts statewide, particularly those that serve large numbers of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. While we are encouraged that the Governor has proposed increasing funding for low-wealth districts by adjusting one of the Foundation Aid State Sharing Ratio tiers and increasing the maximum ratio from 0.91 to 0.93, we believe that a more comprehensive approach to address the outdated poverty measurement and weights is critical to ensuring that all New York students are provided with the “sound, basic” education they deserve.

Finally, we are concerned that the Governor's office did not engage education experts in considering changes to the Foundation Aid formula. Despite multiple efforts, EdTrust-New York had no ability to discuss changes to the Foundation Aid formula with the Governor's office and have our recommendations taken into consideration.

We look forward to working with the Governor's office and the legislature to more comprehensively address changes to the Foundation Aid formula and ensure educational equity.

### **Legislative Budget Request**

We believe the Legislature has an important opportunity to build on the Executive Budget proposal and improve the lives of all New York students and educators by investing in the following K-12 priorities:

#### **Literacy**

Last year's Back to Basics initiative was an important first step in ensuring that all students and educators are provided with instruction and training aligned with the science of reading. However, much more needs to be done to support students and educators to improve reading outcomes across the state. New York ranked 37th in fourth grade reading on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and only 35% of Black third graders and 32% of Latinx third graders scored proficient on the 2023-24 New York State ELA assessment. State leaders must respond to these unsatisfactory outcomes by approaching literacy as a multi-year, phased-in investment that incentivizes schools to align instruction and professional learning with the science of reading. For the 2026 budget, we urge support for the following:

- **Professional Learning:** Many current educators were not provided with literacy training aligned with the science of reading as part of their teacher preparation program. As a result, educators across the state will require the science of reading aligned professional learning to support classroom instruction and help meet the state's new literacy requirements. Last year's investment in professional learning was an important first step. However, we estimate that over 40,000 current K-3 teachers will not benefit from the training funded in last year's budget. New York must also address the literacy needs of older students. Struggling readers face cumulative academic challenges that not only hinder their performance in K-12 but also limit their access to higher education and



career opportunities. Since most middle school teachers lack training in reading instruction, they will require additional funding to provide evidence-based support to their students. We propose **\$15 million** for grants to districts to ensure all K-8 educators are provided with the opportunity to receive a micro-credential in the science of reading, including programs developed by SUNY, CUNY, and other New York based organizations.

- **Curricula aligned with the science of reading:** Evidence-based curricula are an essential component of the state’s requirement that all district instructional resources are aligned with the science of reading by September 2025. We propose a **\$10 million** investment to provide grants to districts the New York State Education Department identifies as “high-needs” for the purchase of K-5 literacy curricula, including curriculum based professional learning, aligned with the science of reading, with priority for districts replacing disproven balanced literacy programming.

### Foundation Aid

As the state considers the recent report by the Rockefeller Institute on the Foundation Aid formula, we urge that **the formula be fully funded**, with at least a 3% inflation factor and the additional fixes proposed in our testimony to the Rockefeller Institute. We also support updating the Regional Cost Index to better reflect the costs of salaries and services, which have greatly increased in the almost two decades since this data was first released. We also urge the following changes to the current weighting system:

- **Better target support for multilingual learners (MLLs)** by including the use of differentiated weights by proficiency level and type of services and programs required. This should include the costs associated with educating additional subgroups of multilingual learners, such as students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) and long-term MLLs who require additional support to gain proficiency.
- **Better target support for students with disabilities** by increasing the weight for students with disabilities while enabling significant differentiation based on service levels required and moving the weight from the Total Aidable Foundation Pupil Units (TAFPU) to PNI. Additionally, any funding for students with disabilities should also include support until students graduate or turn 22 years old.
- Provide an additional weight for **students in temporary housing and foster care youth**.
- Include **per-pupil Pre-K and 3k funding in the formula** and increase funding for state-funded Pre-K and 3k programs by indexing state-funded universal Pre-K allocations to the K-12 Foundation Aid per-pupil amount to provide a sustainable and predictable formula that is aligned with K-12 funding levels.
- Finally, we propose **the establishment and funding of an Independent Commission**, composed of a range of experts and stakeholders, that further studies the formula and proposes a comprehensive update of the full Foundation Aid formula, as well as additional changes on a periodic and ongoing basis.



## FAFSA completion

New York took a major step forward to improving FAFSA completion rates by passing a Universal FAFSA law last year. Data indicates that students who complete the FAFSA by the end of their senior year are 84% more likely to enroll in college, yet just 65% of New York high school students completed the FAFSA in 2022. FAFSA completion is particularly important for students of color and low-income backgrounds, as it provides the financial support necessary to make a college education possible and affordable.

To meet the new Universal FAFSA completion requirements, districts and community partners need significant support to increase outreach and meet the law's requirements:

- We propose a **\$3 million** new investment that would allow for grants to community-based organizations to support outreach to students and funding to NYSED to meaningfully collect data on the law's implementation, particularly around student waivers.
- Additionally, the state should **assess the gap in school counselors** needed to support Universal FAFSA completion and provide additional funding for districts to hire school counselors.

## College in High School


Research shows that students who take college courses while in high school are more likely to attend and complete college. EdTrust-New York conducted an analysis, using our [To and Through data tool](#), of New York State students who: graduated from a New York high school; are Tuition Assistance Program recipients; attended a New York State college or university; and while in high school, were enrolled in college less than half-time. We analyzed six years of data for such students who enrolled in college in the fall of 2017, allowing us to track these students through spring 2024. We found that:

- Students were more likely to persist in college;
- Students were more likely to earn their degrees "on time;" and
- Students were more likely to receive a degree.

We are pleased the Executive Budget includes the creation of a College in High School Opportunity Fund. We are concerned, however, that this was money previously allocated and is not a new investment. To invest in College in High School in a way that would dramatically increase the likelihood and persistence of students in high school from underrepresented groups going to college and attaining a degree, we urge the Legislature to provide an additional **\$50 million** to:

- **Replicate successful models** of programs with a proven track record of serving students of color—particularly Black, Native American and Latinx students, and students from low-income backgrounds, and other underrepresented groups in college.
- **Increase access for underrepresented groups** in existing programs, by providing funds to districts and Institutes of Higher Education specifically to cover the full cost of





participation for students from low-income backgrounds to participate in existing programs.

- **Create new programs** in parts of the state that have few or no college in high school programs.

### High-Impact Tutoring

Students in all grades continue to be impacted by pandemic-related unfinished learning as evidenced by recent state assessment data showing that less than half of all New York students are proficient in reading. High-impact tutoring is a proven strategy to address unfinished learning and improve student outcomes in reading and math and we propose a **\$20 million** investment for schools and community-based organizations to provide this critical support.

I want to thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before you today and offer strategies to further educational equity for students throughout New York. We appreciate the Executive's and Legislature's leadership on these critical issues and look forward to continuing to work together for New York's students and our collective future.

