



Testimony for the Joint Legislative Hearing on the 2026–2027 Executive Budget Proposal: Elementary and Secondary Education

January 29, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the 2026–2027 Executive Budget. My name is Chelsea Baytemur, Director of Policy and Advocacy for the YMCA of Greater New York, and I am here today on behalf of the Coalition for Equitable Education Funding (CEEf). CEEf is made up of more than 120 advocacy and civil rights organizations, social service providers, and groups representing students, parents, and educators, who have come together to advocate for the resources needed to ensure every student receives a high-quality education, with a focus on those who need the most support.

We appreciate that in 2023 the State fully funded the Foundation Aid formula for the first time and that the Governor is proposing to fully fund it again this year. However, the formula itself is mainly unchanged from more than 15 years ago, uses outdated and incomplete measures of need, and does not adequately reflect the needs of today's students and school communities.

In fact, the limited changes made in the final NYS Fiscal Year 2026 budget resulted in New York City schools receiving **\$314 million less** than they would have received had the State made no changes to the formula at all. This stemmed from an update to the formula's poverty weight *without* updating other key measures. The poverty weight relies on the grossly inadequate federal poverty guidelines and measures poverty the same way in every school district across New York, even though costs look different in different parts of the State.

As you begin the budget process, we urge you to ensure the budget includes continued full funding for the Foundation Aid formula *with key changes*, so that it better reflects the true cost of providing a sound basic education to today's students and accounts for the tremendous variation of need and expenses across the different regions of New York State.

While the Executive Budget does propose that the State continue to fully fund Foundation Aid, we are concerned that it leaves out necessary improvements to the formula. We call on the State to make the following two changes to the Foundation Aid formula to help ensure schools can meet the needs of all students:

- **Update the Regional Cost Index to better reflect the rising costs of salaries and services.** This metric is supposed to account for varying costs throughout the State; however, the values for most regions have been fixed since 2006. An update to the RCI is needed to better reflect the higher salaries and costs required in school districts such as New York City.

- **Add a per-pupil weight for students in temporary housing and students in the foster system.** Last school year, more than 154,000 New York City students experienced homelessness, and around 6,700 students spent time in the foster system. At present, the Foundation Aid formula does not provide any additional funding to help schools support these student populations, both of whom face tremendous obstacles to success in school and have educational needs distinct from those of all students in poverty.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.