

My name is Jasmine Gripper, current legislative director for the Alliance for Quality Education and a proud product of the New York City public school system from Kindergarten to CUNY. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

The Foundation Aid Formula was created in response to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity law suit, after the courts ruled that New York State was violating student's constitutional right to a, "sound basic education" by underfunding New York City schools. A decade after the creation of the formula we are here questioning the integrity and validity of the formula. But, it is impossible to analyze the effectiveness of a formula that has never been fully funded. The original promise of CFE, came with a commitment from NYS leaders to increase school aid by \$5.5 billion over four years. Here we are ten years later and our schools are still owed nearly \$4 billion in unpaid Foundation Aid. When the 2006 financial crisis hit, our children and schools paid the price. Wall Street received bailouts while schools received budget cuts. Since, Wall St. has recovered and there are more millionaires and billionaires in New York than ever before, yet year after year kids are still being told there isn't enough money to fund schools.

At the last Foundation Aid Roundtable in Bayside Queens Senator Liu claimed that you all have turned over every rock trying to find the money to fund schools. We'll to Senator Liu and all the elected officials here today, let me help you out. As you prepare to head back to Albany in January and take on the all-important task of negotiating the state budget. Do not let another year go by allowing income inequality to be the norm in New York State. If those at the very top pay their fair share, then there's more than enough resources in this state to fund schools and support children and their families.

Last year the New York State Assembly proposed raising income taxes on the ultra-wealthy, a small increase from those making \$5 million, \$10 million and more annually can bring in billions of dollars in new revenue. Let's not forget that in Governor Cuomo's first year in office he cut taxes for millionaires and cut over a billion from schools. Clearly he has his priorities all wrong.

When we fail to fund our schools, our children pay the price. Last year AQE teamed up with Senator Robert Jackson and toured schools across New York State. We found that many schools lack science labs and have out-of-date equipment for students to conduct experiments. One school reported using "paper labs," and another reported having science experiments performed by the teacher while students could only observe. One school did not have a science teacher at all. This leaves students at a disadvantage for state tests and college admissions requiring advanced science instruction. Schools in New York have technology, computers and software that is decades old. We toured a school where students were using computers with Windows 97. Most school district officials reported that there is not enough funding to maintain or repair the devices their schools currently have, much less to purchase up-to-date devices for all students to accommodate the needs of the 21st century. Many schools do not have a librarian, or share one librarian among several schools. Having a library but not a librarian means that the library cannot be fully utilized, and students miss out on important research and media skills and opportunities to be exposed to the joys and benefits of reading. Class sizes are too large, with 32 students in elementary school classrooms. Our children deserve so much better than this.

Now, this is not the reality for every student in New York State. Wealthy districts and suburban districts have small class sizes, up to date technology, full service science labs and a plethora of extra curricula activities to choose from. These well-funded districts usually have a 90% graduation rate with students

leaving high school prepared for college are careers. These mostly white, wealthy public schools are often considered some the best schools in the nation.

Too often it is Black children, Latinx children, immigrant children and children from low income communities that are left with limited opportunities and underfunded schools. It's time to reverse the decades of inequity and get back on track to fully funding the Foundation Aid formula. Once the formula has been fully funded then we can better discuss ways to improve the formula.

It is encouraging to hear progressive leaders on the national stage talking about a wealth tax and corporate greed tax. It's time for New York's progressive leaders to increase revenue in the state budget through progressive taxation. The best economic development plan is to invest in our children, they are the future of our state. Ensuring that all children have access to a high quality education regardless of income, zip code and immigration status must be a top priority for elected leader in New York State.