A Primer: School Funding & Equity

Lessons learned from the first year of school-level budget transparency data in 76 New York school districts

March 2019
What do we mean when we talk about resource equity?

- Our interest is rooted in how the education system can increase achievement and opportunity for historically under-served groups of students.

- **Resource equity** is an important component. We see it as a 3-piece puzzle:
  - The overall level of state and local funding a school district has
  - How well the resources are spent
  - How the school district distributes funds

- **What happens once resources get to a school district** has historically received the least transparency and attention.
The context: Shining a light on how districts allocate funds

• Last year’s state budget required 76 school districts to release data on their 2018-19 school-level budgets – for the first time ever. These budget transparency requirements will expand to more districts over the next few years.

• Federal law will require all school districts to release data on their school-level actual spending, beginning after the 2018-19 school year. Depending how the state sets the reporting requirements, we hope to be able to see how a district planned to spend its funds versus how they were actually invested.

• The current Executive Budget proposal would also require certain school districts with under-funded high-need schools to prioritize those schools for additional resources, based on a formula in law.
How should a district allocate funding among its schools?

• There is no single “correct answer.”

• But we know that the schools that serve the students with the greatest needs should receive significantly more funding than the schools that serve the students with the least needs.

• Here’s the general pattern we’d hope to see:

As the share of low-income students in a school rises…

...the amount of funding the district invests in the school should increase significantly.
How should a district not allocate funding among its schools?

As the share of low-income students in a school rises...

...the amount of funding the district invests in the school stays about the same

As the share of low-income students in a school rises...

...the amount of funding the district invests in the school decreases
What we see in New York’s data

Our analysis of elementary and middle school budgets in 32 large and mid-sized school districts revealed:

- 19 school districts (59%) budgeted about the same in their highest-need and lowest-need schools.

- 6 school districts (19%) budgeted at least 5% less in their highest-need schools compared to their lowest-need schools.

- Only 2 school districts (6%) budgeted at least 20% more in their highest-need schools compared to their lowest-need schools.

Remember:
Equal is not the same as equitable. Equity requires significantly greater support in the highest-need schools than currently appears to be the case. And funding inequity impacts students both across different districts and within the same district.
Disproportionate assignment of the newest teachers to the highest-need schools contributes to this inequity:

- 10 school districts (31%) planned to assign approximately the same share of experienced teachers in their highest-need and lowest-need schools.

- An additional 12 school districts (38%) planned to assign at least 5% fewer experienced teachers to their highest-need schools.

Remember:
Equal is not the same as equitable. Equity requires significantly greater support in the highest-need schools than currently appears to be the case. And funding inequity impacts students both across different districts and within the same district.
How much can school districts invest and how are they allocating their resources?

A look by region
The Big 5
Elementary/middle schools
The Big 5
High schools
Western NY
Elementary/middle schools

Niagara Falls – lowest need, $12,647
Niagara Falls – highest need, $12,917

Dunkirk – lowest need, $16,964
Dunkirk – highest need, $16,307

Evans-Brant (Lake Shore) – lowest need, $18,985
Evans-Brant (Lake Shore) – highest need, $17,690

Lockport – lowest need, $17,325
Lockport – highest need, $17,021

Jamestown – lowest need, $12,606
Jamestown – highest need, $14,230

State & local total (including central office)
Long Island
Elementary/middle schools

- Brentwood - lowest need, $17,447
- Brentwood - highest need, $16,387
- Hempstead - lowest need, $16,886
- Hempstead - highest need, $16,780
- Roosevelt - lowest need, $27,545
- Roosevelt - highest need, $26,781
- William Floyd - lowest need, $22,961
- William Floyd - highest need, $21,085

State & local total (including central office) vs. Share of low-income students
Capital Region & Mid-Hudson

Elementary/middle schools

- Newburgh – lowest need, $18,743
- Newburgh – highest need, $19,397
- Schenectady – lowest need, $15,551
- Schenectady – highest need, $15,905
- Troy – lowest need, $19,374
- Troy – highest need, $21,688

State & local total (including central office)
Central NY
Elementary/middle schools

State & local total (including central office)

Share of low-income students

- Auburn
  - Lowest need: $14,417
  - Highest need: $14,369

- Central Square
  - Lowest need: $15,701
  - Highest need: $14,369

- Cortland
  - Lowest need: $17,555
  - Highest need: $17,778

- Fulton
  - Lowest need: $17,994
  - Highest need: $17,965

- Oneida
  - Lowest need: $15,814
  - Highest need: $14,730
Mohawk Valley
Elementary/middle schools

Utica – lowest need, $14,008
Utica – highest need, $14,820
Amsterdam – lowest need, $13,814
Amsterdam – highest need, $14,442
Rome – lowest need, $17,226
Rome – highest need, $21,069
Sherrill – lowest need, $12,450
Sherrill – highest need, $14,252

State & local total (including central office)
Southern Tier
Elementary/middle schools

State & local total (including central office)

Share of low-income students

Binghamton – lowest need, $17,525
Binghamton – highest need, $17,723
Elmira – lowest need, $14,546
Elmira – highest need, $14,454
How much can school districts invest and how are they allocating their resources?

A closer look at the Big 5
For every $100 per student invested by Buffalo in its lowest-need elementary/middle schools, they are budgeting just $4 per student more in their highest-need schools.
For every $100 per student invested by Buffalo in its lowest-need high schools, they are budgeting just $8 per student more in their highest-need schools.
New York City
Elementary/middle schools

For every $100 per student invested by New York City in its lowest-need elementary/middle schools, they are budgeting $15 per student more in their highest-need schools.
New York City
High schools

For every $100 per student invested by New York City in its lowest-need high schools, they are budgeting **$22 per student more** in their highest-need schools.
Rochester
Elementary/middle schools

For every $100 per student invested by Rochester in its lowest-need elementary/middle schools, they are budgeting just $4 per student more in their highest-need schools.
Rochester High schools

For every $100 per student invested by Rochester in its lowest-need high schools, they are budgeting just $6 per student more in their highest-need schools.
For every $100 per student invested by Syracuse in its lowest-need elementary/middle schools, they are budgeting just $4 per student more in their highest-need schools.
Yonkers
Elementary/middle schools

For every $100 per student invested by Yonkers in its lowest-need elementary/middle schools, they are budgeting $1 per student less in their highest-need schools.
Our resources

- We launched The New York School Funding Transparency Tool at www.NYSchoolFunding.org.
- The tool makes it possible to look up any school and see parent-friendly budget information.
- Parents can also access advocacy resources and directly contact their school district during the 2019-20 local budget process.
Data Note

- Please see [www.NYSchoolFunding.org](http://www.NYSchoolFunding.org) for a complete data note.

- This analysis is limited to school districts with enough schools for comparison and that have sufficiently diverse enrollment so that some schools in the district have a significantly higher share of low-income students than other schools (by at least 10 percentage points).

- 32 mid- and large-sized districts meet these criteria:
  
  - **Large school districts:** A school district is included if they have at least 10 elementary/middle schools and/or at least 10 high schools. For these school districts, we compare the lowest-need quartile of schools to the highest-need quartile of schools.
  
  - **Mid-sized school districts:** A second set of school districts is included if they have at least 3 elementary/middle schools serving the same grade span and at least a 10 percentage point gap in the weighted average of low-income students in at least two of those schools.
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