



Adequate. Constitutional. Equitable.

BRIEFING BULLETIN | No. 2

Do All New York Students Have an Equal Opportunity to Meet Educational Outcome Goals? *Findings from AIR's Evaluation of Student Outcomes and Student Needs*

The [Adequate, Constitutional, Equitable \(ACE\) School Funding Project](#) is a collaboration between the Center for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University, and American Institutes of Research (AIR). Our goal is to provide reliable independent research to contribute to New York State budget deliberations for the next fiscal year and to advance the development of a new school funding formula that will respond to current student needs and ensure students' right to a sound basic education is honored now and in years to come.

[What's the ACE School Funding Project?](#)

[The first report](#) from the ACE School Funding Project examined the *equity* of the current New York State school funding system—whether the state distributes school funding to school districts according to student need. [Our second report](#) examines data on student outcomes and students' needs that will help to evaluate the *adequacy* of the system—that is, whether all students are being provided the opportunity to meet the state's educational outcome goals.

The report's findings support a reconsideration of the current approach to school funding:

- Although some students are performing well, overall, New York State's students are not meeting challenging proficiency goals.
- On average, student performance in New York, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is lower than students in five neighboring states, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont.
- Schools with higher-need student populations have systematically lower student outcomes. Higher levels of economic disadvantage is the student need variable most strongly related to lower student outcomes, although the percentages of students with disabilities and English learners also independently relate to lower student outcomes.
- **These patterns indicate that the current state funding system does not provide sufficient resources and educational supports to districts and schools serving higher-need student populations in order to support meaningful opportunities to obtain a sound basic education.**

Background

In 2007, New York State adopted a new school funding system to comply with the court decision to guarantee all students their right under the state constitution to “the opportunity for a sound basic education” (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) v. State of New York*, 2003). The New York State Education Department (NYSED) developed the [Foundation Aid formula](#) to promote adequacy and equity by calculating the amount of funding needed to provide the opportunity for a sound basic education to all students, and including more state funding to high-need districts serving larger proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, or students learning English as a new language.

In the subsequent 17 years, however, the state education system has seen many changes that affect school funding needs—changes in demographics, student needs, and education mandates. Today, NYSED and most major education policy and advocacy organizations in New York agree that the current formula no longer meets students’ educational needs. The Center for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) are collaborating on an independent study to advance the development of a constitutional school funding formula for New York State to replace the current Foundation Aid formula.

Findings from AIR’s Evaluation of Student Outcomes and Student Needs

In New York, the state’s highest court declared that all children must be provided the “opportunity for a sound basic education,” applying reasonable proficiency standards that define the knowledge and skills students need to function productively as civic participants. For the education funding system to be constitutional, all students in the state should be provided a meaningful opportunity to meet the state’s educational outcome goals. The examination of student outcomes in relation to the state’s goals and in relation to student needs is critical for understanding the adequacy of the educational system.

To offer a more comprehensive view of school performance, AIR developed an “outcome factor score” that includes not only math and ELA scores but also graduation rates, dropout rates, and Regents’ diploma achievements. AIR’s analysis of the overall level of student outcomes suggests New York is close to meeting some, but not all, of its stated goals for 2028-29. The performance of New York’s students, however, is quite low in relation to other states in the region. AIR also notes that the state’s goals for 2028-29 are low in relation to the extensive gap between current performance and the state’s own “end goals” for a sound basic education. Furthermore, only 36% of students earn the advanced Regents designation on their diplomas, an important measure of college and career readiness in the state.

AIR also looks at student performances in math and ELA from 2004 through 2022 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a test known as “the nation’s report card.” Over this period, AIR finds that, across all grades and subjects, New York student performance has not reached a level that would be deemed proficient based on the NAEP definition or on the state’s own definition (with the exception of grade 4 math in some years).

AIR provides analyses of New York’s student need and student outcomes in comparison with our five neighboring states. These analyses show that

- With few exceptions, New York’s student performance has lagged behind the performance of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont throughout this 18-year period.
- New York has (a) more students in poverty than both the national average and all five of the neighboring states, (b) more students with disabilities than the national average and four of the five neighboring states, and (c) more English language learners than four of the five neighboring states.

Most importantly for the examination of adequacy, equity, and constitutionality of New York’s school funding system, AIR’s analyses of the relationship between school-level outcomes and student needs show schools with higher-need student populations have systematically lower student outcomes.

“These patterns suggest the current differentiation of funding based on student needs **does not provide** sufficient resources to ... higher-need student populations necessary to support equal opportunity to achieve common outcomes.”

Higher levels of economic disadvantage is the variable most strongly related to lower student outcomes. However, the percentages of students with disabilities and English language learners also independently show strong relationships with lower student outcomes. The negative relationship between economic disadvantage and student outcomes increases as students progress through school, indicating that the negative effects of economic disadvantage may be compounded as students move from elementary and middle school levels to high school.

New York is obligated by its state constitution to provide all students a meaningful opportunity to meet reasonable proficiency standards. **These patterns suggest the current differentiation of funding based on student needs does not provide sufficient resources to districts and schools serving higher-need student populations necessary to support equal opportunity to achieve common outcomes.** As AIR states in its report, “[A]chieving educational goals requires adequate funding.”