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# 2019-2020

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*Providing Safe, Sustainable,  
High-Quality Equitable Education*

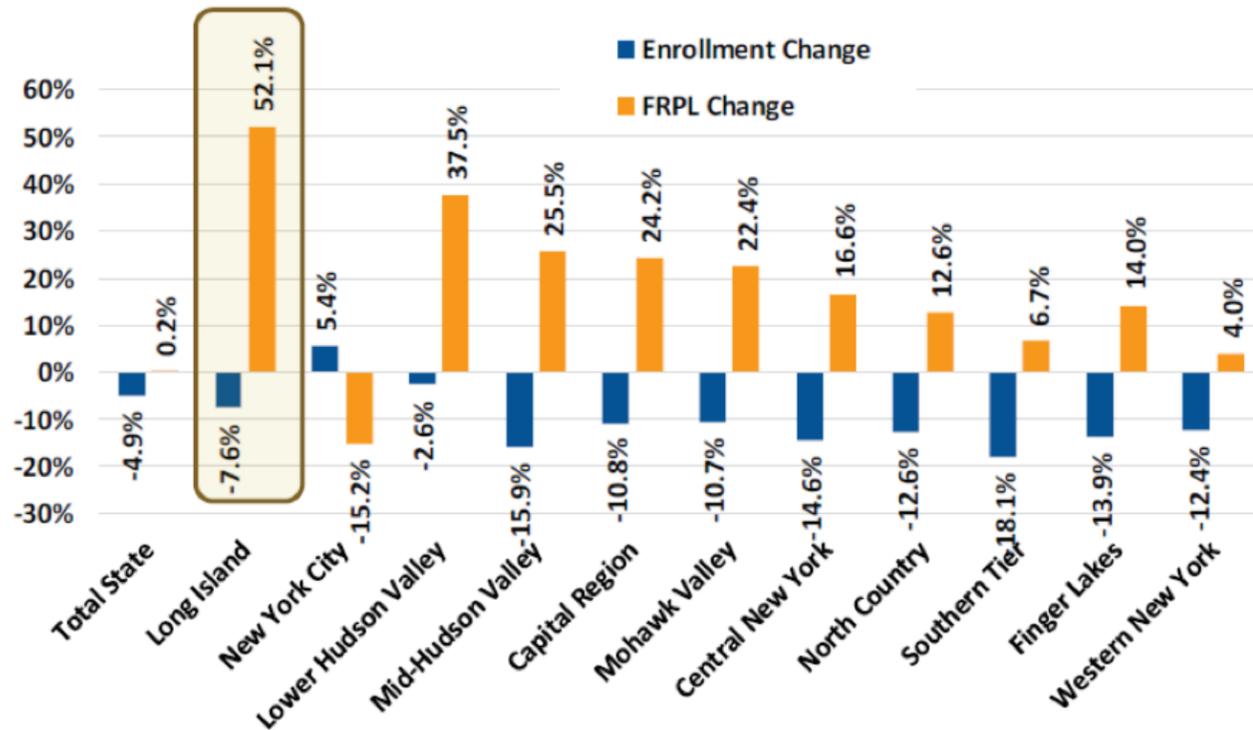
**One Island, One Voice,  
One Goal, Different Challenges**

## Shifting Student Needs and District Challenges

### Increasing Student Poverty

- Over 37% of the students on Long Island qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.
- There has been a 52.1% (K-6) increase in free and reduced-price lunch numbers on Long Island since 2007-08, higher than any other region in the state.

### Change in Student Enrollment and Poverty NYS by Region 2007-08 to 2018-19



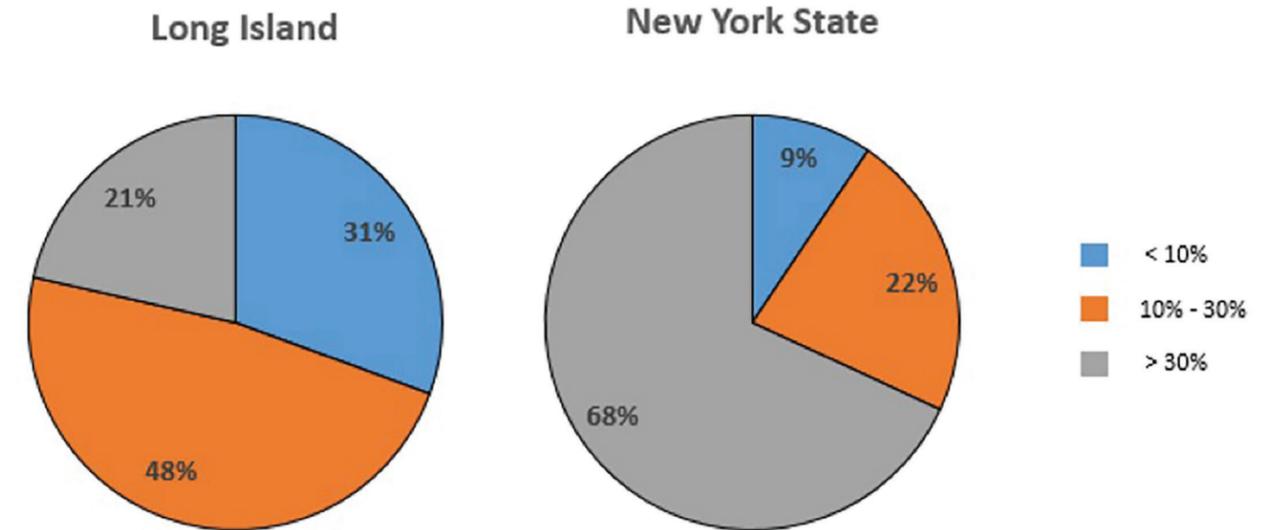
Source: NYSCOSS Analysis, presentation to SCSSA, September 2019

### English Language Learners

- 17% of the state's total English Language Learner population is on Long Island.
- Four of the top 10 districts across New York State for enrollment of English Language Learners are on Long Island.
- 17 of the 22 districts in New York State that exceed 20% of their population in English Language Learner enrollment are on Long Island. All of those school districts have over 60% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, combining the challenge of poverty and English language acquisition.
- Overall, Long Island has over 9% of English Language Learners as a % of enrollment.

### School District Revenue From State Aid – Long Island vs. New York State 2019-20

In spite of this, Long Island schools continue to provide an outstanding education on the backs of the taxpayers who support them. Statewide, 68% of the school districts receive over 30% of their revenue from state aid compared to only 21% of Long Island school districts. Comparatively, 31% of school districts on Long Island receive less than 10% of their revenue from the state, compared to only 9% statewide.



Sources: 2019-20 Property Tax Report Card and 2019-20 Legislative State Aid Runs

### Misperception of Wealth and Need for Suffolk County School Districts

- 21 are high wealth (that's only one-third)

**However,** of those 21...

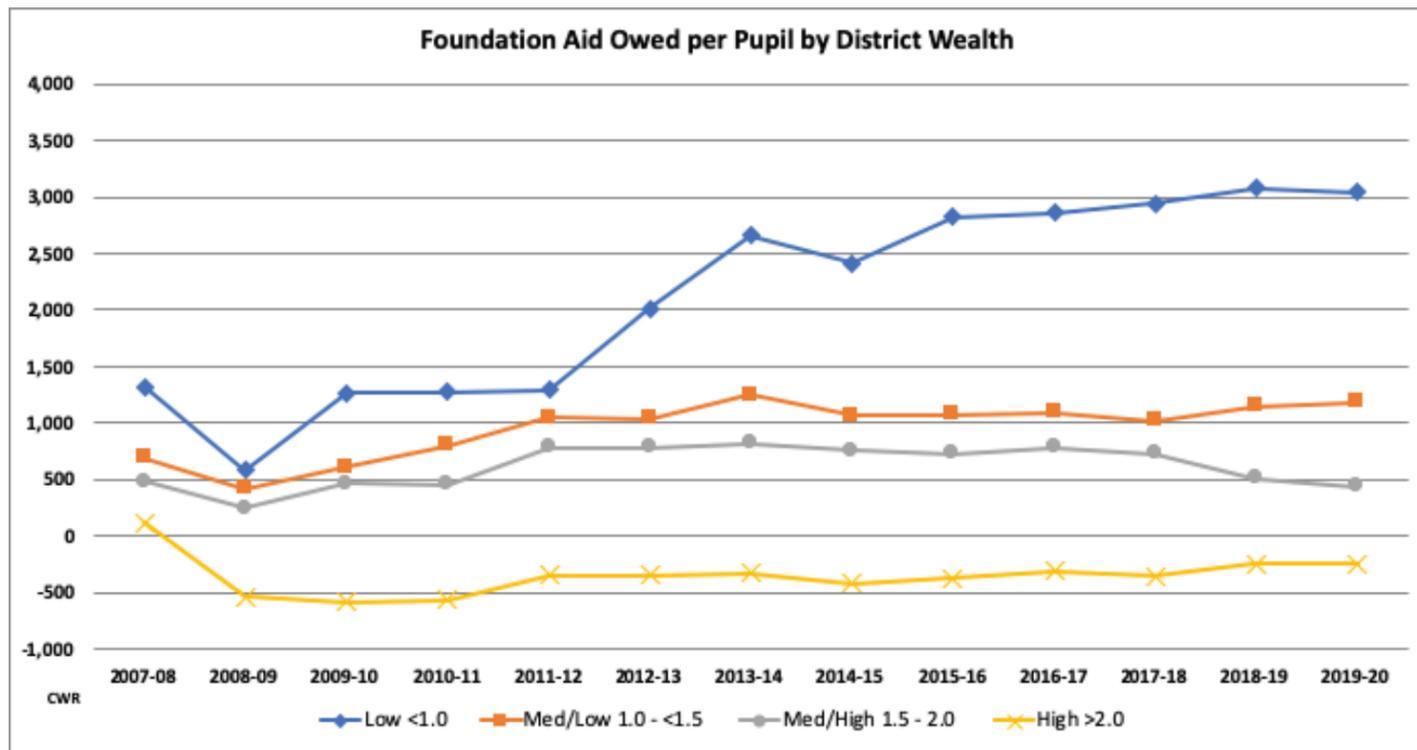
- 7 have a 25% to 50% rate of students who qualify for FRPL
- 3 have over 50% who qualify for FRPL
- 0 receive more than 10% of their revenue from the state

## Our Students Need Their Fair Share

There is much data that documents the changing demographics across Long Island. The reputation of Long Island as one of the wealthiest parts of the state does a disservice to the needs of the increasing number of school districts below the state average in wealth and the increasing needs of the students who live in them.

Had Foundation Aid been fully funded, Long Island would be receiving an additional \$847 million in 2019-20, with 81.4% of that aid owed to low-wealth public school districts. The average amount owed per pupil to low-wealth school districts is \$3,040. The total amount of Foundation Aid owed to Long Island since 2007-08 is almost \$7.6 billion.

## History of Foundation Aid Per Pupil Owed on Long Island by Wealth 2007-08 to 2019-20



Sources: 2019-20 State Aid Runs and Questar III Foundation Aid History

To add to the fiscal challenges, Long Island taxpayers are feeling the impact of the federal legislation capping the tax deductibility of state and local taxes (SALT-D) as most of our communities' taxes routinely exceed that. In spite of these challenges, the state share of school aid to Long Island remains at 12.96% of the statewide school funding while we have 16% of the enrollment. These funding inequities do not reflect the increasing needs of our students and communities.

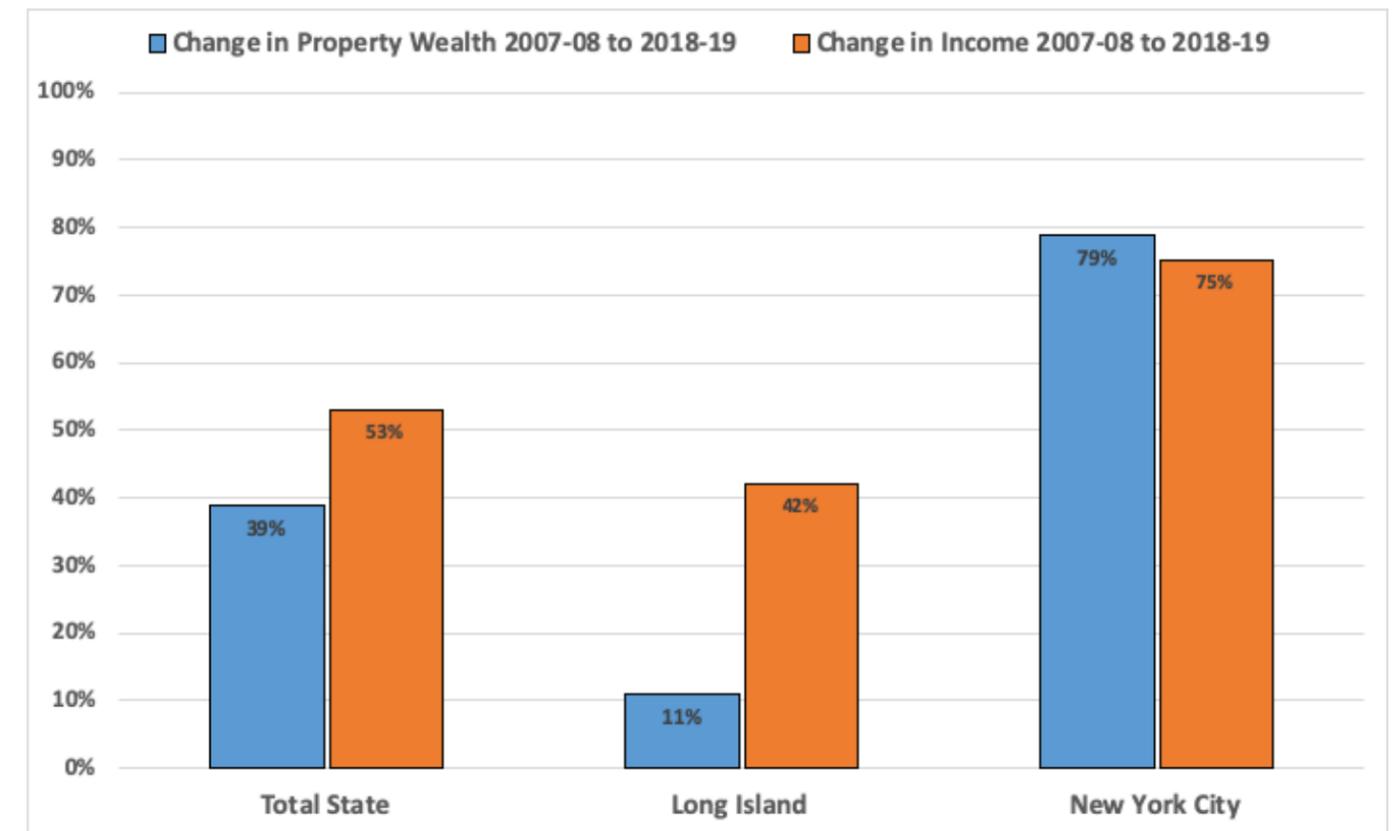
## Students With Disabilities and Social-Emotional Challenges

- Long Island has seen a 12% increase in the number of students with disabilities since 2007-08 compared to a 5.3% increase in the rest of the state.
- Teen hospitalizations on Long Island due to self-inflicted injuries exceed the statewide average.
- Nassau and Suffolk counties are in the top four counties statewide for deaths involving drugs.

## Shifting Property Wealth

- 44.5% of the students on Long Island live in school districts of below-average wealth. 57.6% of the students are in Suffolk County and 29.1% in Nassau County.
- Long Island property wealth has increased only 11% in the past 11 years compared to the statewide increase of 39%.
- Incomes on Long Island are shifting. Long Island's income has only increased by 42% since 2007-08 compared to the overall statewide increase in income of 53%.

## Change in Property Wealth and Income by Region 2007-08 to 2018-19



Source: NYSCOSS Analysis, presentation to SCSSA, September 2019

## Pre-Kindergarten Equity and Access

The first three years of a child's life are the most important in terms of brain development. This is when children learn language, emotional controls and establish the basis for healthy growth throughout their lifetime. If we want children to start school prepared to learn, and to succeed, then we must support ALL young children and their parents, not just those who are able to afford high-quality pre-K. Waiting until a child is in school is too late to close achievement gaps, setting children up for future challenges. The lack of investment in our youngest citizens profoundly impacts children born into families with low incomes and severely limits their life choices.

Governments at all levels in the U.S. spend more than twice as much on a per-child basis for children ages 5-17 as on children 0-5, which is almost the opposite of the support given children and families in every other wealthy nation in the world. New York follows the national trend, spending 2.3 times as much on older children. The greatest barrier to college education is in the skills children have when they first enter kindergarten. Sixty to seventy percent of the achievement gap between rich and poor children is already evident by kindergarten. For example, children growing up in professional families hear an average of 2,153 words per hour; children in working-class families hear 1,251 words per hour; children in welfare-recipient families hear an average of 616 words per hour. This vastly divergent experience translates into huge differences in school readiness by the age of four. As the poverty rates on Long Island increase, it is important that we provide equitable access to pre-K for all students.

## Equitable School Safety

Schools across Long Island have worked to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing school safety. We have established collaborative relationships and developed coordinated efforts across towns, villages and county law enforcement. We have lobbied for changes in legislation at the state and federal levels, and have developed plans to support the social, emotional and mental health of students.

Legislative actions that are essential to supporting school safety:

- Establishment of an expense-driven categorical aid with the designation of "School Security Aid" to partially reimburse districts for expenditures related to school security in a wealth-sensitive manner.
- Remove the earnings limit for retired law enforcement officers working as school security staff.
- Amend Election Law Section 4-104(3) to add public school buildings to the list of public places that can file a written request to be removed from the list of polling places.
- Require quarterly meetings of the Smart Schools Review Board to expedite dissemination of funds for the purposes of upgrades to safety-related items.
- Modify the tax levy limit calculation to exclude expenses related to school safety and security, and the use of the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) as a component of a measure of district wealth.
- Expand the School Resource Officer Program and better synchronize legislation to preserve local control between law enforcement and school districts.
- Incorporate the costs of increased mandates related to cybersecurity in funding for school safety as we respond to the mandate to protect personally identifiable information.

## Predictable and Sustainable School Funding

### Revised/Revamped Foundation Formula

The Foundation Aid, enacted in 2007, was a significant public policy accomplishment as it instituted a predictable, needs-based formula to drive state aid to schools. This multi-year formula was subsequently neglected for several years, frozen for three and minimally increased in subsequent years. Year after year, school districts must wait for the allocation of state aid to schools prior to being able to finalize their budgets for the following school year.

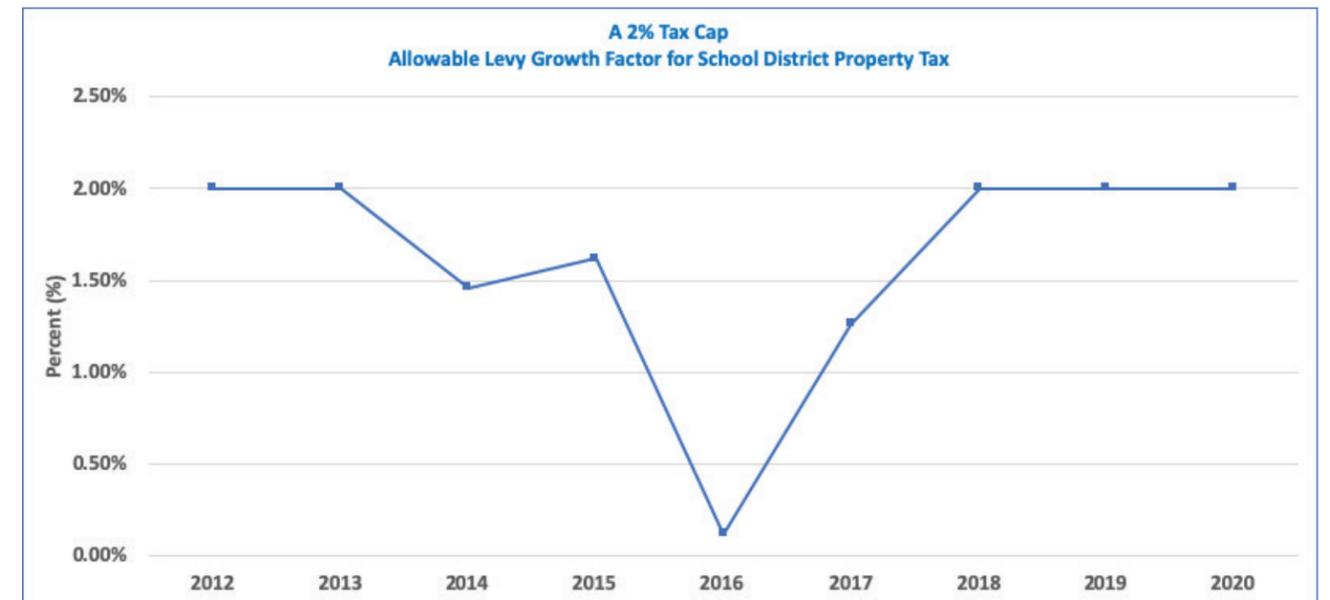
With the institution of the tax levy limit placing constraints on districts to raise local money, a multiyear formula for school aid would greatly assist school districts with long-term planning and budgeting. The year-after-year adjustments to the formula have only served to make it less and less effective. It is time to institute a statewide task force to do the hard work to revamp the formula in a way that makes sense for the changing school district profiles and diverse demographics on Long Island.

### Modifications to the Tax Levy Cap

There is little argument that the now-permanent tax levy cap has curbed the rise of taxes across the state. Now, it is time to make the necessary adjustments to the law to address the unintended consequences. In light of this, we advocate for the following prudent modifications;

- Establish a fixed 2% tax levy cap by eliminating the provision for variation based on CPI.
- Exempt the cost of community-approved school safety initiatives.
- Include BOCES capital costs to school districts in their tax levy cap calculations.
- Eliminate the possibility of negative tax levy caps.
- Include properties covered by PILOTS in the tax base.
- Exempt the cost of new government mandates.
- Exempt the ever-burgeoning costs of health insurance.

### Tax Cap Since Inception



Sources: 2019-20 Property Tax Report Card and 2019-20 Legislative Budget State Aid Runs.