

State Ed opts to give lawmakers options, rather than taking strong stance on aid formula

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ALBANY - State education policymakers Monday opted to give lawmakers a variety of options for possible revisions to the state's school aid formula rather than taking the seemingly stronger stance policymakers [originally proposed](#) online.

"We really believe that there's a strong reason to give various choices on how this could be done and to make those options clear and concise," State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia told reporters following the state Board of Regents discussion, adding that there are many budgetary factors for 2017-18 that are still unknown. "We want to give this wide array and then allow those things to shake out."

The department, abiding by legislation from last session, must send a report outlining its recommended changes to the state's Foundation Aid formula, particularly on pupil need, to the Legislature and Gov. Andrew Cuomo by Oct. 1. Actual aid changes would only come as a result of formula revisions undertaken by the Legislature and governor during the state budget process.

The roughly 70-page Foundation Aid formula was established after the state's highest court in 2006 ruled that New York was underfunding schools and not meeting its constitutional burden to provide children with a "sound basic education." The formula takes into consideration a number of factors, but is based on four main points: the cost of a successful education, student need, regional cost differences and local district fiscal capacity.

The formula, however, was never fully phased in because of the recession, and much has changed since the formula was put in place, including district demographics and rising costs.

Recommended changes regarding student need posted on the state Education Department's website last week took a firm stance, including the need to use more up-to-date data, since a portion is currently based on the 2000 Census data. The recommendations also included the need to phase-out the free and reduced-price lunch calculation, a factor used in determining poverty and need in a district-a no longer reliable method due to changes in reporting.

The document containing the recommendations was removed Monday morning after [an article](#) by POLITICO New York outlined the changes.

A state Education Department official said the Regents would not be making "formal recommendations," but would instead be "discussing options." The board is not required to vote on the recommendations, as the report will come from the commissioner.

A revised document was posted Monday afternoon, which included several other options including requiring income forms for all students rather than free and reduce-priced lunch data. Another suggestion would be to continue with the present course while adding a save harmless clause for those schools that as a community qualify for free and reduce-priced lunch (meaning students would not be required to fill out the form).

"I think that what we had put out last week was 95 percent of a good discussion, but the last 5 percent was really hard to close," Regent James Tallon Jr., who chairs the Regents State Aid Subcommittee, told

reporters. "[The Legislature is] not going to take this item as a specific debating point, this is going to be part... of a broader conversation."

He continued saying, "We looked at more specific recommendations and then took a step backward to put more options on the table at this point and that's just realistic of where we are."

Elia and Tallon both said the discussion would continue as budget discussions begin.

"Nothing is perfect," Tallon said adding, "the current system that we've used is not perfect either."

The board's discussion on Monday did show that the regents believe there's a need for some type of change to aid distribution.

"We've got this issue of comparisons and measurements and looking across and saying we want to compare how these kids are doing against these kids, but ...the underlying fundamental issue is that we know that money does matter," Regents Chancellor Betty Rosa said.

Read the revised recommendation document here: <http://bit.ly/2cUy53z>.

And the original document here: <http://politi.co/2cjztZG>.

To view online:

<http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2016/09/state-ed-opts-to-give-lawmakers-an-array-of-options-rather-than-take-strong-stance-on-aid-formula-changes-105381>