THE ROAD AHEAD:

School District Insolvency

JANUARY 2014

New York State Association of School Business Officials

NYS ASBO • New York State Association of School Business Officials • Founded 1948

Advancing the Business of Education

Executive Summary

This study examined recent data to determine whether school districts are on the road to either educational or financial insolvency or both. The report focused on professional staffing losses and fund balances maintained by 671 New York State school districts excluding the Big Five city school districts.

Findings include:

- Two hundred sixty-one school districts showed signs of fiscal insolvency through a reduction in Unassigned Fund Balance (savings) from school year 2010-11 to 2012-13, 544 school districts showed signs of educational insolvency as a result of reduced professional staff, and 206 school districts showed signs of both fiscal and educational insolvency.
- School districts are balancing their budgets at the cost of educational programs, as evidenced by cuts in professional staff. School districts have reduced staff ten percent over the past five years, while pupil enrollment has declined only three percent.
- Of the approximately 40 percent of school districts that lost fund balance, high need urban/suburban school districts and average need school districts lost the most and low need school districts lost the least. High need urban/suburban school districts have approximately one-third the fund balance per pupil of low need school districts.
- Thirty-eight percent of school districts experienced loss in Restricted Fund Balance and this phenomenon was relatively uniform across all district types.

Contents and Figures

Contents

Figures

Contact:

Michael J. Borges, Executive Director

The New York State Association of School Business Officials (NYSASBO)

7 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207 | www.nysasbo.org

mborges@nysasbo.org | 518-434-2281 ext.231

Introduction

This study provides a status report on New York State school district finances. It follows a 2012 NYSASBO study on the same topic which examined the state of unrestricted fund balances in New York State school districts and found that high need school districts in rural, urban and suburban communities were exhausting their fund balance at an alarming rate, representing the cumulative impact of the Great Recession and state efforts to contain school expenditures. Almost a year and a half later, what is the status? This study seeks to review data provided by school districts in their annual financial reports to answer the following questions.

1. Do some types of school districts continue to have less fund balance than others?
2. Are school districts balancing their budgets at the cost of educational program, as evidenced by cuts in professional staff?
3. How many school districts are showing signs of (a) fiscal insolvency, (b) educational insolvency and (c) both fiscal and educational insolvency?
4. Are some types of school districts using up their fund balances faster than other districts?
5. What is the right amount of fund balance?
6. Does the use of school district reserves vary for groups of districts categorized by student poverty and fiscal capacity?
7. What are legislative proposals under consideration to help school districts to be solvent, both fiscally and educationally?

Background

The past six years have been characterized by many events that have affected school revenues: a new State funding formula promising to simplify aid distribution and provide additional funds to educate students who need extra time and help, a global economic collapse followed by short-term federal stimulus funds, state policymakers responses to balance the budget and contain the growth of school revenues including the Tax Cap, the Gap Elimination Adjustment, and a limit on the growth of State school aid. Each of these events has affected the actual and projected impact on sources of funding for schools. A report issued by the State Comptroller[1] says the bottom line, is:

> *Schools are facing fiscal challenges that are not likely to dissipate in the short term. Between a tax levy limit that restricts local funding, State and federal aid cuts followed by capped growth administered in a complex and opaque manner, and a lack of other sources of funding, schools are in a period of low revenue growth.*

What is school district insolvency?

Generally speaking, an insolvent school district lacks the ability to provide a sound basic education that prepares students for college and career readiness with a reasonable tax effort. The Board of Regents commissioned a study in 2003 led by Syracuse University's Bill Duncombe that described school district insolvency as lacking good financial condition. They defined it this way:

> *Financial condition of school districts is defined as the ability to finance adequate student performance over the long run with reasonable tax burdens and without temporary disruptions of service. Adequate student performance implies students reaching the academic standards set by the New York State Board of Regents.*[2]

That is, financial condition has fiscal aspects and educational aspects. This concept underlies the common use of two terms: fiscal insolvency and educational insolvency. It is not enough for a district to pay its bills and open on a daily basis (that is, to be fiscally solvent); the district must also finance adequate student performance over the long term (that is, to be educationally solvent). A district that cannot offer all of the coursework to meet Board of Regents standards and achieve a level of success with student performance is not educationally solvent. Duncombe, Jump, Ammar and Wright (2003) proposed a financial indicator system that would assess both educational and fiscal solvency, but New York State did not adopt this. While other existing systems focus their efforts on assessing fiscal solvency, it is important to keep in mind that educational solvency is equally important.

Why should we be concerned?

New York's Constitution, Article XI, states: 'The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a system of free common schools, wherein all the children of this state may be educated." If our schools are not solvent, children do not get educated and our society is weakened as a result. Young people are ultimately not prepared for success in the workforce and the independence required for a strong economy and healthy citizenry. Fiscal and educational solvency is the foundation on which our education system functions and thrives.

There are several consequences of fiscal stress. Inequities in educational opportunity that exist in the current system cannot be ameliorated. Reforms, such as meeting higher standards to respond to increasing demands in the workforce, are difficult to accomplish, and inequities can be exacerbated. The number of dropouts and students not prepared for economic independence will grow, businesses will increasingly turn to other countries to fill high skilled jobs, and there will be a growing imbalance between those that are contributing to our economy and those that are taking from it.

Measures of Fiscal Stress

New York State Education Department and the Office of the State Comptroller have assessed school district fiscal stress.

The New York State Education Department. The State Education Department identifies two groups of districts: those in stress and those that demonstrate concern that they are headed for stress. The indicators used to assess the two groups are no or low fund balance and an imbalance between assets and liabilities:

- *High Risk Districts (Fiscal Stress)*
  - Negative fund balance
  - Unreserved, undesignated fund balance is negative and total fund balance is less than 2 percent of adopted budget
- *Medium Risk Districts (Fiscal Concern)*
  - Fund balance is less than 2 percent of adopted budget
  - Cumulative operating deficit is less than -6 percent of adopted budget and fund balance is less than 5 percent of adopted budget
  - Current ratio (assets to liabilities) is less than 1.25 and fund balance is less than 5 percent of adopted budget

NYSED's fiscal stress system has often been described as a system that measures short-term financial condition. It shows when districts are stressed but doesn't predict that they are headed to stress over the long term. Given the Department's separate extensive focus on school accountability, this approach may have been adequate for its purposes.

Comptroller assessment of fiscal stress. The Office of the State Comptroller has developed an Early Warning System that assesses the financial condition of local governments and school districts. It assesses both financial and environmental indicators and rates local governments and school districts as "in fiscal stress, as well as those showing susceptibility to fiscal stress."[3] Ratings for school districts were first released in January 2014. For school districts, financial indicators include:

- Unassigned General Fund Balance
- Total General Fund Balance
- Operating Deficits
- Cash Ratio (ability to pay current liabilities)
- Cash as a Percentage of Monthly Expenditures
- Short-Term Debt Issuance
- Short-Term Debt Issuance Trend (over the last three years)

A score is calculated for each of the seven financial indicators to arrive at an overall score for each school district. School districts are assigned to the following categories based on a composite score, which weights indicators based on their relative importance to school district financial condition:

- Significant fiscal stress
- Moderate fiscal stress
- Susceptible to fiscal stress
- Not in fiscal stress

The system also assesses and reports on environmental factors that affect school district financial condition. These include:

- Change in Property Value in the current fiscal year
- Change in Enrollment in the current fiscal year
- Trend in First Budget Vote Being Defeated over the last four fiscal years
- Change in Approval Percentage for the First Budget Vote for the most current fiscal year
- Graduation Rate Percentage for the most current fiscal year
- Free and Reduced Price Lunch Percentage for the most current fiscal year

Environmental factors are measured and compiled in a manner weighted for their relative importance for school district environment and are categorized in three levels of adverse environmental condition with a designation (###, ## or #) added to the school district's assessment of financial condition. Thus the Comptroller's assessment of school district financial condition includes measures of short-term financial condition, similar to the State Education Department's, and also includes an assessment of the environment in which the school district operates, which can have an impact on the short and long-term financial condition of a school district.

Financial condition indicator system. Professors from Syracuse University and LeMoyne College developed a blueprint for a Financial Indicator System for New York School Districts as part of the Board of Regents and State Education Department's Education Finance Research

Consortium.[4] Although this financial condition indicator system was not funded or implemented beyond this initial blueprint, it was develop collaboratively with an advisory panel of school superintendents and school business officials and as such gives us a method to assess the Comptroller's and State Education Department's methods of assessing school district fiscal stress.

The financial condition indicator system developed by Duncombe et al. under the advice of school officials included four components:

- Short-term financial condition
- Long-term financial condition
- Economic condition and
- Student performance

As noted in the definition of financial condition on page 2 (taken from Duncombe et al., 2003), this concept of financial condition recognizes the importance of fiscal and educational insolvency. Whether a school district can pay its bills is important, but whether it can pay its bills and educate its students is even more important.

Furthermore, educating students can be measured and Duncombe et al. measure this as the school district's ability to meet learning standards imposed by the Board of Regents. How do the two systems fare in assessing fiscal and educational insolvency? As we have shown, the State Education Department assesses only fiscal solvency, and short-term fiscal solvency at that. There are no measures of long-term financial condition or the ability of the school district to educate its students, although the Department assesses this separately from finance with its school accountability system.

The Comptroller's fiscal stress monitoring system includes measures of short-term financial condition similar to SED's, such as most recent year fund balance, deficit and cash available to pay the district's bills. In addition, the system includes trend information over three and four years related to debt and budget vote approvals, which helps districts to assess long-term financial condition. The system also includes two measures which help to assess educational solvency: the assessment of student eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Lunch reflects the greater demand students have for additional educational services and graduation rate assesses the extent to which the district is meeting its goal of educating all students. This broader assessment of school district financial condition provides a more accurate picture of school district financial condition.

NYSASBO has made a number of suggestions to improve indicators used in the Comptroller's assessment of school district fiscal stress.

- Reserve fund changes over the past 3 years provide a better picture of school districts' fiscal health than a one-year change.
- Assigned and unassigned fund balances should not be combined.
- Short-term borrowing varies based on regional tax collection deadlines (i.e. Suffolk County school taxes are not received until January) and therefore may not be a valid statewide indicator.
- Cash position can be misleading and timing plays a big role in this and therefore its relative importance should be reduced as a factor.
- Staffing reductions over the past three years should be included as an indicator.

NYSASBO emphasized that any data used in developing a Fiscal Stress Monitoring System should not impose additional record keeping or reporting requirements on school business offices and should be more than just a snapshot in time of the fiscal condition of a school district, taking into account both the circumstances preceding and projections going forward that put the picture into a proper context. The release of the fiscal stress report should first be vetted with the school district for inaccuracies or omissions and released in late January or early February before school districts finalize their budgets for the upcoming year. Finally, the recent release of the results of the Comptroller's Fiscal Stress Monitoring System identifying 13 percent of New York State school districts as fiscally stressed, emphasizes the point that fiscal indicators represent only part of the picture. Program stress, as evidenced by staff losses, shows district losses in educational programs that eventually will lead to educational insolvency. As our definition of financial condition has shown, fiscal and educational insolvency are two sides of the same coin and should both be considered in determining if a school district is fiscally stressed or not.

Fund Balance

Fund Balance is that which is left over at year-end because revenues were greater than estimated or expenditures were less than estimated. The Government Accounting Standards Board which sets fiscal guidelines followed by New York State school districts defines five categories of fund balance[5]:

1. Nonspendable –Inherently nonspendable in the current period due to form or must be maintained intact;
2. Restricted –Subject to legal purpose restrictions;
3. Committed –Constrained to a purpose by formal action of government's highest level of decision making authority;
4. Assigned –Constrained to a purpose of "intended use"; established by the board of education or designated official;
5. Unassigned –"Residual classification of General Fund"; could be Unassigned Fund Balance or deficit in General Fund

Restricted fund balance sets aside or encumbers funds to support legally allowable reserves such as for workman's compensation, unemployment, repair and capital expenditures, and their use is generally considered to be sound financial management practice. Assigned fund balance dedicates funds to reduce the following year's tax levy. Unassigned fund balance are those pure savings left over after all district commitments have been met and allowable reserves have been funded. Education Law section 1318 limits unassigned fund balance to be no more than four percent of the next year's budget.

What is the right amount of fund balance? We have seen two systems of school district financial condition that watch fund balance carefully and pronounce a school district in fiscal stress if fund balance is too small. This is because a school district, like any business, needs some cushion to deal with emergencies and student growth, such as the education of additional students with disabilities that need extensive services in the middle of the school year. But the law also contains a limit on unassigned fund balance of four percent. Some have noted that different types of school districts need different levels of fund balance.[6] A higher wealth school district can live with a lower fund balance because they have a greater capacity to raise additional revenues. A small school district with less capacity to raise revenue may need to have a higher fund balance to make ends meet. Regardless, it is clear that school districts need fund balance to operate and the ideal amount is probably close to the limit especially for small and low-wealth, high poverty school districts. Prudent oversight of the fund balance is also a critical part of the financial management of the district.

Role of the school business official in managing fund balance

Managing the school district's fund balance is a critical part of the role of the school business official. It has a direct impact on the ability of the district to provide continuing educational services and can directly affect the tax levy. Careful monitoring of fund balance is critical to prevent dramatic fluctuations that may anger taxpayers and threaten the stability of critical educational programs. Beginning in January and continuing each month until June, the business official should update estimates of fund balance to reflect updated information on expenditures and revenues and present an increasingly more accurate picture of whether the school district will end the year with an Unassigned Fund Balance or a deficit. The business official can also help to guide the Board of Education and public in making regular investments in reserves where the district expects considerable or continuing expenditures.

Analysis

We examined the latest available Annual Financial Report data[7] on school district reserves and Unassigned Fund Balance for school years 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13. All New York State school districts were included except special act school districts, non-operating school districts, minor (less than eight teacher) school districts and the Big 5 city school districts. Where appropriate we examined results for school districts categorized by four fiscal capacity and student need categories: high need rural school districts, high need urban and suburban school districts, average need school districts and low need school districts. Figure 1 shows the number of school districts in each category. For a detailed description of the calculation of need/ resource capacity categories, see Reference 1, page 17.

In addition, we examined the loss in total professional staff by these districts from 2008-09 to 2012-13 to get a sense of how the Great Recession affected district programs.

Figure 1. School District Need/ Resource Capacity Categories

School District Category	Number of Districts
High Need - Urban/ Suburban	46
High Need - Rural	153
Average Need	339
Low Need	133
Total	671

School districts in good financial condition retain healthy reserves to meet known obligations and to be able to respond to emergencies and other unknown financial circumstances so that educational services continue uninterrupted and taxpayers are not subjected to burdensome tax hikes.

How did school districts do in 2012-13? Figure 2 shows that 61 percent of school districts maintained their financial condition with no change or gains to their Unassigned Fund Balance. Thirty-nine percent, however, exhibited varying degrees of fiscal stress through reductions in this Fund Balance. Examining Restricted Fund Balance, those reserves allowable by law for specific areas of school district spending, shows a similar picture: 62 percent of districts had no change or increases and 38 percent lost revenue in these reserves (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Unnasigned Fund Balance Change 2011-2012 to 2012-13

	Loss	No Change or Gain	Total
Number	262	409	671
Percent	39.05%	60.95%	100%

Figure 3. Restricted Fund Balance Change 2011-2012 to 2012-13

	Loss	No Change or Gain	Total
Number	258	413	671
Percent	38.45%	61.55%	100%

Caution is urged in interpreting the data. While roughly six out of ten school districts maintained or increased fund balance, this may have occurred at the cost of educational programs. The Education Conference

Board has reported that New York State school "districts have shed more than 30,000 staff members since 2009 in response to reduced funding."[8] A district that maintains its fiscal integrity in the face of economic distress is to be commended, but given cuts to staffing and educational programs vital to student success, how many school districts are ensuring "adequate student performance" as our definition of financial condition requires?

To get at this question, we examined the change in total professional staff for New York State school districts and found that staff numbers have declined consistently since 2008-09. Figure 4 shows this trend. Examining trends in enrollment and professional staff over the last five years, NYSED data show that New York State school districts lost approximately ten percent of its staff and three percent of its students (see Figure 5). The State lost 26,117 (9.85 percent) professional staff and 75,556 (2.93 percent) public school pupils. That is, New York State school districts reduced one professional staff member for about every 3 students that left the public school system. Looking at historical data, we observe that the number of professional staff in New York State school districts in school year 2012-13 was less than in 1999-2000, 13 years earlier.

Figure 4. Total Professional Staff: New York State School Districts

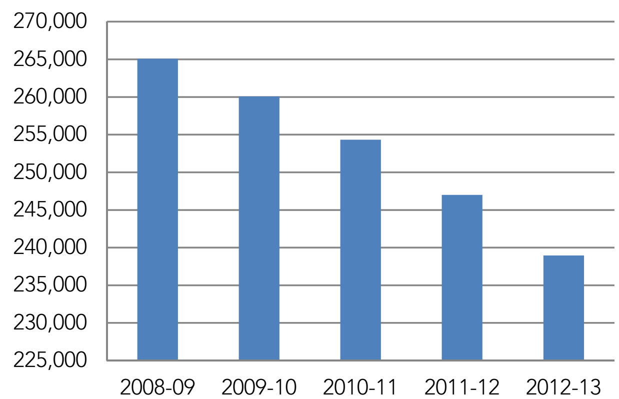
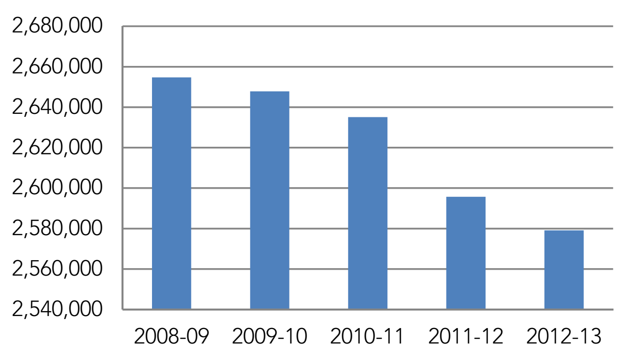


Figure 5. K-12 Enrollment: New York State School Districts



Staff loss has occurred at more than three times the rate of enrollment loss. Has this been different for different groups of districts? To get at this question, we examined staff lost by school districts grouped according to the State Education Department's student need and resource capacity categories. Figure 6 shows that examining loss across groups of districts from school year 2010-11 to 2012-13, average and high need rural school districts had the greatest loss in staff, followed closely by high need urban/suburban school districts. Low need school districts had the least loss, as would be expected.

Examining the change in the percent of pupils per staff, Figure 7 shows us that high need urban/suburban school districts had the highest pupil to staff ratios of all the district groups.

Figure 6. Professional Staff Loss 2010-11 to 2012-13

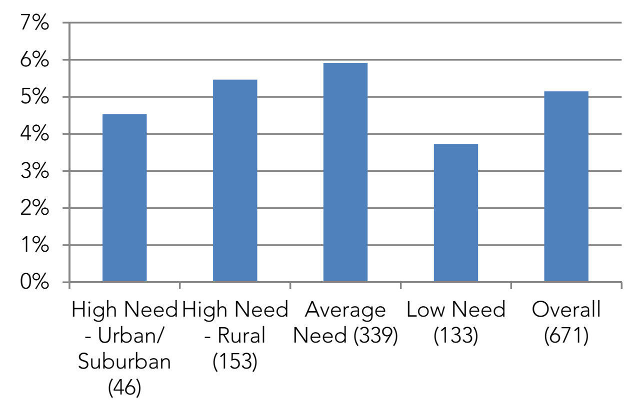
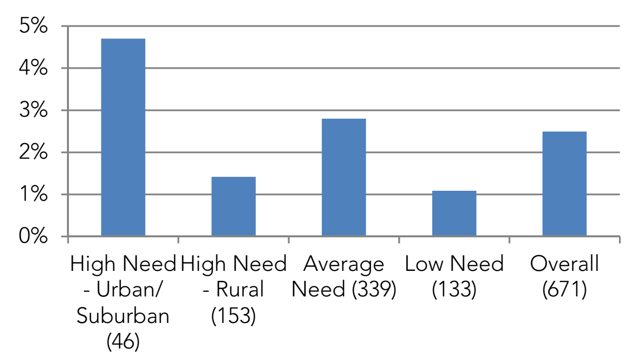
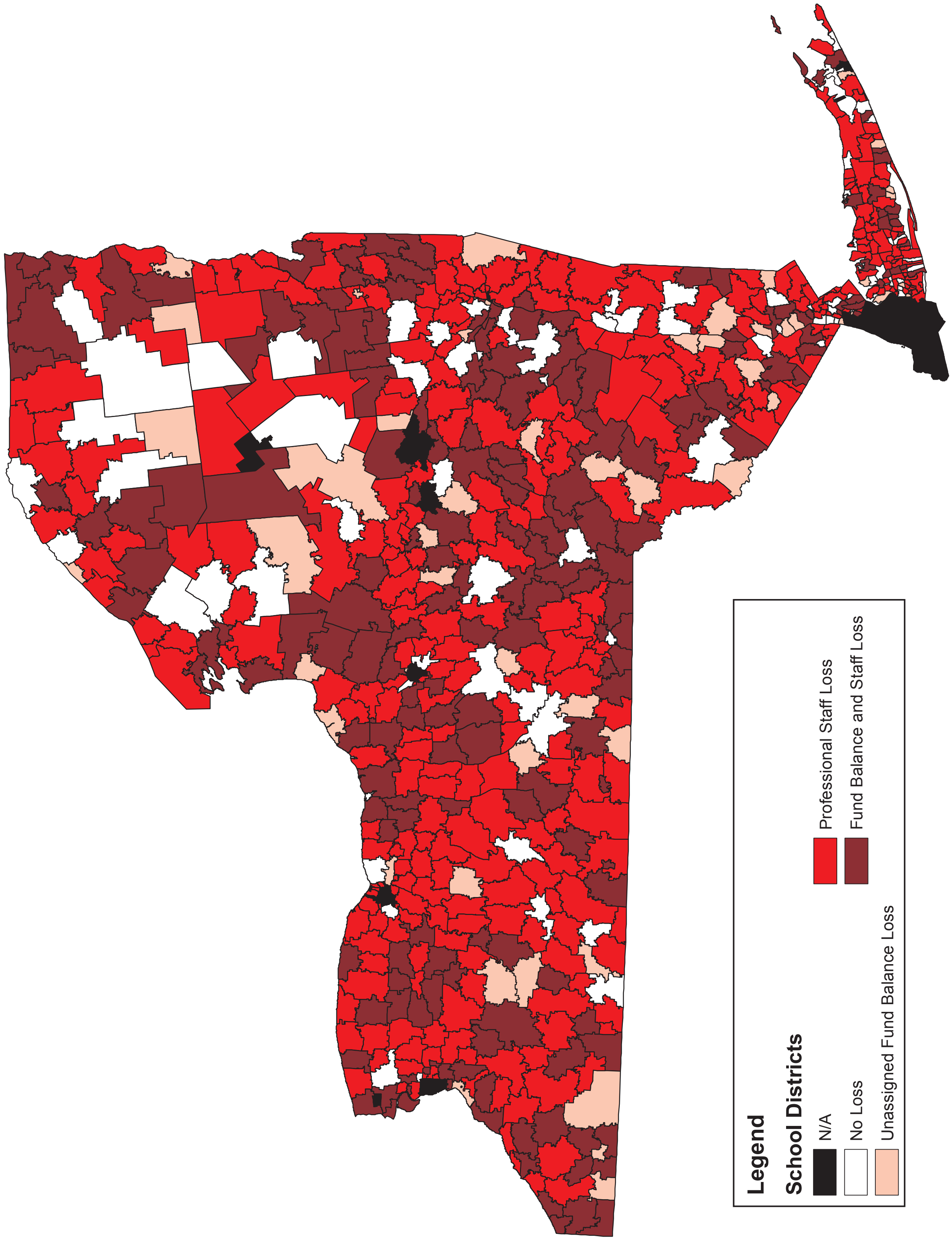


Figure 7. Pupil per Staff Percent Change 2010-11 to 2012-13



How many school districts are experiencing signs of fiscal insolvency, educational insolvency and both fiscal and educational insolvency? Figure 8 shows a map of these data: 261 school districts lost Unassigned Fund Balance from 2010-11 to 2012-13; 544 school districts lost professional staff over this period and 206 school districts lost both fund balance and staff.

Figure 8. School Districts that Lost Fund Balance and Staff
2010-11 to 2012-13



Adding to this dismal picture of staff cuts that disproportionately affects high and average need school districts, roughly four out of 10 school districts in New York State are also losing Unassigned Fund Balance and Restricted Fund Balance. The balance of this study examines details related to these losses.

Figure 9 shows the percent of school districts in each category that lost Unassigned Fund Balance. More than 50 percent of high need rural school districts lost Unassigned Fund Balance; more than 40 percent of high need urban/suburban school districts and more than 30 percent of average need school districts lost Unassigned Fund Balance.

Figure 9. Districts Reporting Loss in Unassigned Fund Balance 2011-12 to 2012-13

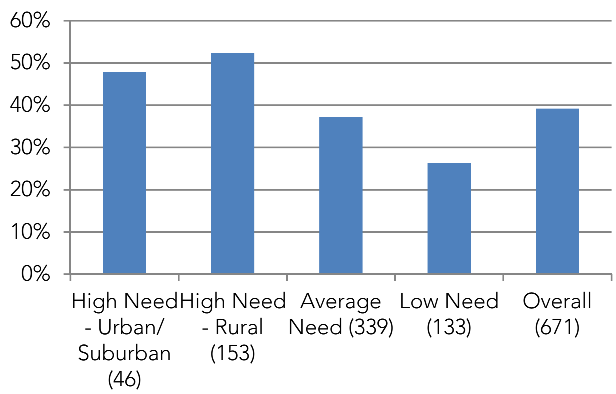


Figure 10 examines the percent of school districts in each category that lost restricted fund balance. An average of 38 percent of all school districts lost restricted fund balance and this was felt uniformly around the state. In contrast to other patterns, a larger percentage of average need school districts, followed by low need school districts, lost restricted fund balance although 30 percent or more of all categories of districts reported a loss in restricted fund balance.

Figure 10. Districts Reporting Loss in Restricted Fund Balance 2011-12 to 2012-13

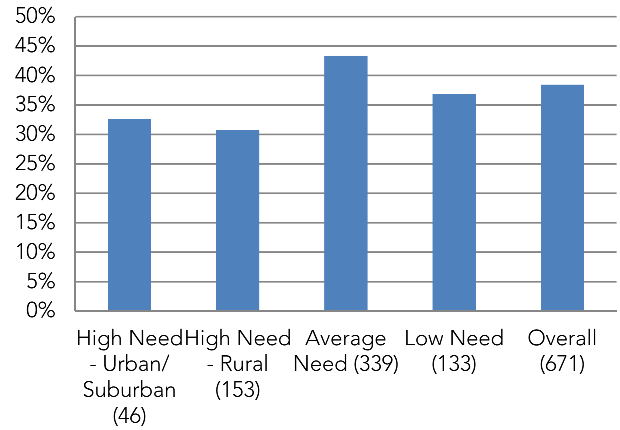
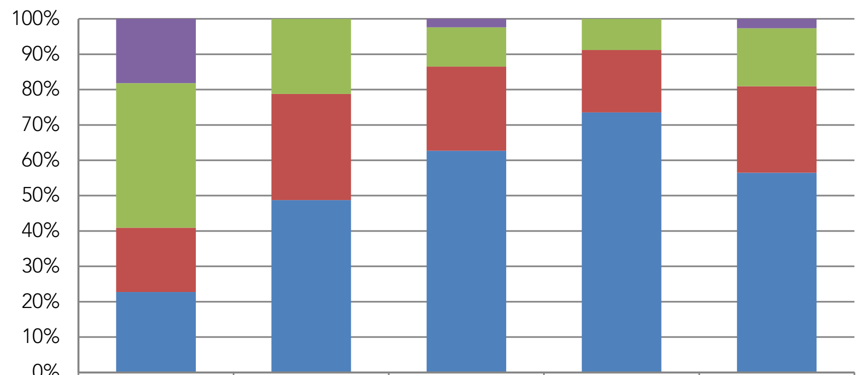


Figure 11 provides more detail on 262 school districts whose Unassigned Fund Balance decreased from 2011-12 to 2012-13. Of these, seven school districts depleted their fund balance. Forty-three school districts lost more than 50 percent of their Unassigned Fund Balance and 148 school districts lost up to 25 percent. High need urban/suburban school districts were the most stressed followed closely by high need rural school districts and average need school districts. For example, of those 22 high need urban/suburban school districts that lost Unassigned Fund Balance, 59 percent lost more than 50 percent, and 18 percent exhausted their Unassigned Fund Balance entirely. Low need school districts that lost fund balance were the least affected with three quarters losing no more than 25 percent of fund balance.

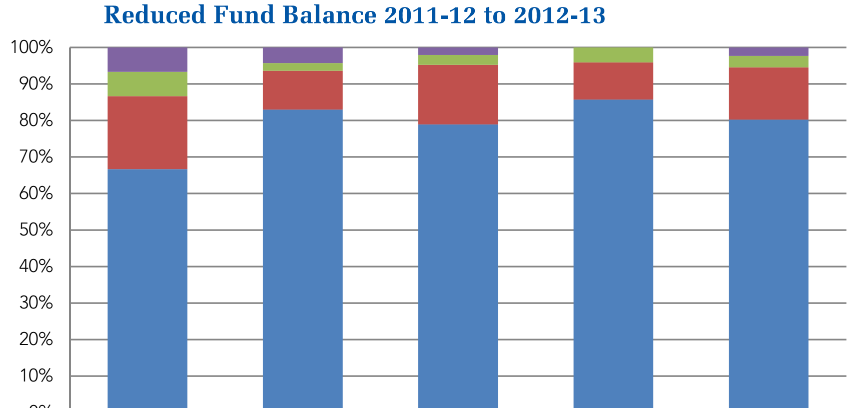
Many of these school districts also reduced funding in their Restricted Fund Balance from school year 2011-12 to 2012-13. Figure 12 shows that 258 school districts reduced funding in Restricted Fund Balance statewide. Of these, six exhausted their reserves completely and 207 school districts lost up to 25 percent. High need urban/suburban school districts and average need school districts were the hardest hit, followed closely by high need rural school districts.

Figure 11. Unassigned Fund Balance Change for Districts that Reduced Fund Balance 2011-12 to 2012-13



	High Need - Urban/ Suburban (22)	High Need - Rural (80)	Average Need (126)	Low Need (34)	Overall (262)
Gone	4	0	3	0	7
Lost more than 50%	9	17	14	3	43
Lost up to 50%	4	24	30	6	64
Lost up to 25%	5	39	79	25	148

Figure 12. Restricted Fund Balance Change for Districts that Reduced Fund Balance 2011-12 to 2012-13



	High Need - Urban/ Suburban (15)	High Need - Rural (47)	Average Need (147)	Low Need (49)	Overall (258)
Gone	1	2	3	0	6
Lost more than 50%	1	1	4	2	8
Lost up to 50%	3	5	24	5	37
Lost up to 25%	10	39	116	42	207

Balance per pupil for each of the four need/resource capacity categories of school districts. It shows that high need urban/suburban school districts and average need school districts have the least amount of unassigned fund balance per pupil and low need school districts the greatest. Given that low need school districts, as a group, have the greatest capacity for raising additional funds and high need school districts (especially high need urban and suburban school districts) have the least capacity for raising additional funds, these findings suggest that the low level of fund balance for high and average need school districts may be a serious problem for maintaining educational programs.

Figure 14 shows Restricted Fund Balance per pupil for these groups of school districts. The pattern we saw for unassigned fund balance holds up for Restricted Fund Balance. High need urban/suburban school districts have the least Restricted Fund Balance per pupil, followed by average need and high need rural school districts. Low need school districts have almost three times the amount of fund balance per pupil as high need urban/suburban school districts.

Figure 13. Average Unassigned Fund Balance per Pupil 2009-10 to 2012-13

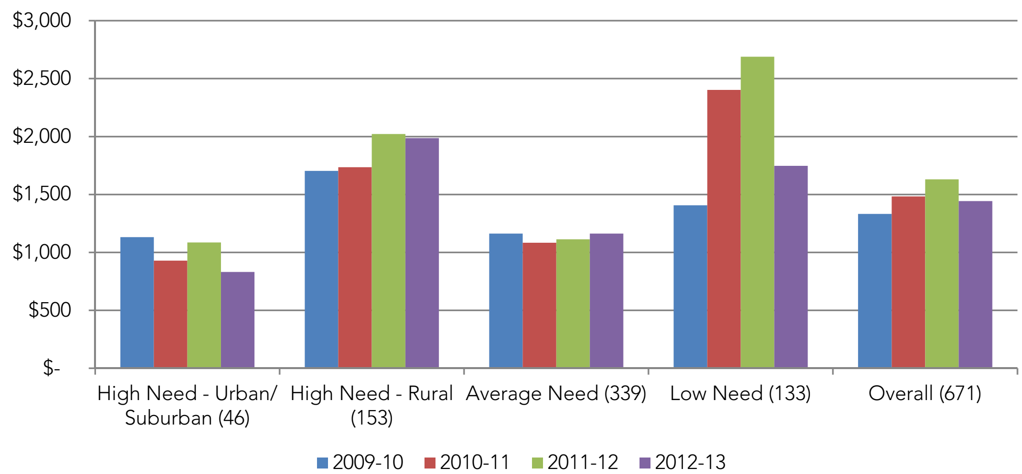
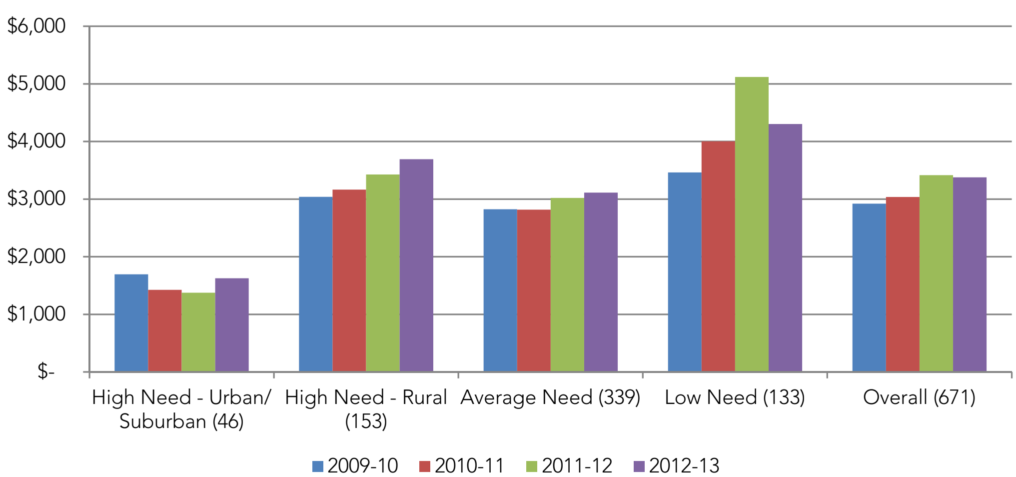


Figure 14. Average Restricted Fund Balance per Pupil 2009-10 to 2012-13



Conclusion

This report answers the following questions:

1. *Do some types of school districts continue to have less fund balance than others?*

   Yes. High need school districts have less restricted and unassigned fund balances. This is worse for high need urban/suburban school districts who have approximately one-third the fund balance of low need school districts.

2. *Are school districts balancing their budgets at the cost of educational programs, as evidenced by cuts in professional staff?*

   Yes. School districts have reduced staff ten percent over the past five years, while enrollment has declined three percent.

3. *How many school districts are showing signs of (a) fiscal insolvency, (b) educational insolvency and (c) both fiscal and educational insolvency?*

   Two hundred sixty-one school districts showed signs of fiscal insolvency through a reduction in Unassigned Fund Balance, 544 school districts showed signs of educational insolvency in reduced professional staff, and 206 school districts showed signs of both fiscal and educational insolvency.

4. *Are some types of school districts using fund balances faster than other districts?*

   Yes. Of the approximately 40 percent of school districts that lost fund balance, high need urban/suburban school district and average need school districts lost the most and low need school districts lost the least.

5. *What is the right amount of fund balance?*

   Good financial practice and fiscal stress monitoring emphasize the importance of fund balance to maintain uninterrupted service, which from an educational point of view is critical to solving our most challenging educational problems, such as success with students from poverty backgrounds and students with disabilities or meeting college and career ready standards. New York law limits Unassigned Fund Balance to four percent of the school district budget. Research suggests that the need for fund balance is greater in school districts that have less fiscal capacity or are small in pupil enrollment. Given a one-size-fits-all limit on Unassigned Fund Balance, a level very close to the limit is desirable.

6. *Does the use of school district reserves vary for groups of districts categorized by student poverty and fiscal capacity?*

   No. Thirty-eight percent of school districts experienced loss in restricted fund balance and this phenomenon was relatively uniform across all district types.

Legislative Proposals to Improve School District Solvency

School district solvency, both fiscal and educational solvency, is a state concern, one that is central to the constitutional mandate to "provide a system of free common schools wherein all the children will be educated (Article XI)." What are legislative proposals under consideration to help school districts to be solvent, both fiscally and educationally?

Increase State Aid to school districts in an educationally responsible manner

First, school districts need adequate, equitable, stable and flexible funding in order to educate students without interruptions or unduly burdening the taxpayer. There is a need for more state aid and/or mandate relief to minimally satisfy the constitutional requirement that all schools provide a sound basic education. Educationally oriented proposals are available and should be seriously considered: NYSASBO ($2.6 billion), Education Conference Board ($1.5 billion) and the Board of Regents ($1.3 billion). All recommend eliminating the Gap Elimination Adjustment reductions imposed on school districts during the Great Recession and providing adequate funding for schools to implement the Common Core State Standards, targeting resources to high need school districts.

Strengthen school district fiscal accountability

Second, additional school district fiscal accountability will serve to strengthen fiscal management in school districts and ensure that new resources are used in the most efficient and effective manner possible. School district finances are complex and multi-faceted and require a high level of expertise in fiscal management to insure that taxpayer funds are properly safeguarded, managed and allocated for maximum student benefit. Appropriately managed school finances are critical to insuring that school districts have the resources necessary to provide a sound basic education that prepares students to be career and college ready. School district finances should be transparent and accessible to the public so citizens have a clear picture of the fiscal condition and results of school districts they are funding. Long range financial planning will help to achieve better fiscal management, and will help boards of education and their communities to make decisions that respond to student needs in a timely manner. The school business official plays a critical role in implementing long range planning to allocate resources to achieve the school district's instructional mission. NYSASBO recommends that the state require all school districts to prepare long-range financial plans and that these be posted on the school district's website each year.

Endnotes

[1] Office of the State Comptroller. Revenue Challenges Facing School Districts. Local Government Snapshot, January 2014. http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/research/snapshot/RevenueChallengesSchools0114.pdf

[2] Duncombe, W., Jump, B., Ammar, S., Wright, R. Developing A Financial Condition Indicator System For New York School Districts, prepared for the Board of Regents Education Finance Research Consortium, 2003, p. i.

[3] Office of the State Comptroller. Division of Local Government and School Accountability. Fiscal Stress Monitoring System. January 2013. http://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/fiscalmonitoring/pdf/fiscalstressmonitoring2013.pdf

[4] Duncombe, W., Jump, B, Ammar, S., and Wright, R. Developing A Financial Condition Indicator System For New York School Districts. Prepared for the Education Finance Research Consortium, May 2003. http://www.albany.edu/edfin/CR03.WD.etal.FCIS.Schools.pdf

[5] NYSED, Contingency Budgets and Other Budget Issues, 2011. http://www.p12.nysed.gov/mgtserv/budgeting/docs/Contingency_Budgets_and_Other_Budget_Issues-March-2011-Fin.pdf

[6] Boyd, D., Lankford, H. and Wyckoff, J. School District Expenditures and Fiscal Stress. Prepared for the New York State Education Department's Education Finance Research Consortium, 2003. http://www.albany.edu/edfin/CR02.BLW.ReportWeb.pdf

[7] We examined Annual Financial Report (ST3) data that school districts reported to the New York State Education Department for the November 15, 2013 database.

[8] Education Conference Board, Financing Public Education In New York State: Restoring a Functional State Aid System. Proposal on State Aid to School Districts to Maintain Existing Programs, January 2014.

Reference 1

Source: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/stateaidworkgroup/2012-13RSAP/RSAP1213final.pdf (page 30)

Definitions of Need/Resource-Capacity Categories of New York State School Districts—January 2012

The need/resource-capacity index, a measure of a district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources, is the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage[7] (expressed in standard score form) to the Combined Wealth Ratio[8] (expressed in standard score form). A district with both estimated poverty and Combined Wealth Ratio equal to the State average would have a need/resource-capacity index of 1.0. Need/Resource-Capacity (N/RC) categories are determined from this index using the definitions in the table below.

Need/Resource Capacity Category	**Definition**
High N/RC Districts	
New York City	New York City
Large City Districts	Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers
Urban-Suburban	All districts at or above the 70th percentile (1.188) which meet one of the following conditions: 1) at least 100 students per square mile; or 2) have an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile.
Rural	All districts at or above the 70th percentile (1.188) which meet one of two conditions: 1) fewer than 50 students per square mile; or 2) fewer than 100 students per square mile and an enrollment of less than 2,500.
Average N/RC Districts	All districts between the 20th (0.7706) and 70th (1.188) percentile on the index.
Low N/RC Districts	All districts below the 20th percentile (0.7706) on the index.

[7] **Estimated Poverty Percentage:** A weighted average of the 2000-01 and 2001-02 kindergarten through grade 6 free- and reduced-price lunch percentage and the 2000 Census poverty percentage. (An average was used to mitigate errors in each measure.) The result is a measure that approximates the percentage of children eligible for free- or reduced-price lunches.

[8] **Combined Wealth Ratio:** The ratio of district wealth per pupil to State average wealth per pupil, used for 2000-01 aid.

Contact:
Michael J. Borges, Executive Director
The New York State Association of School Business Officials (NYSASBO)
7 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207 | www.nysasbo.org | 518-434-2281