



**Testimony for the New York State Senate
Standing Committee on Education
With the Standing Committee on Budget and Revenues
Public Hearing: Foundation Aid Formula
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**Delivered by Brianne Ruiz
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Good afternoon Chair Mayer and Chair Benjamin and members of the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Budget and Revenues. My name is Brianne Ruiz and I am a member of the New York City Young Women's Advisory Council, speaking on behalf of Girls for Gender Equity. Thank you for holding this important hearing on the impact of school funding on student and district needs.

Girls for Gender Equity is an intergenerational, advocacy and youth development organization that is committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. GGE is committed to challenging structural forces, including racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and economic inequality, which constrict the freedom, full expression, and rights of trans and cis girls and young women of color, and gender non-conforming youth.

The Young Women's Advisory Council is a program of Girls for Gender Equity and is a youth-driven policy project that started in 2015 with the former City Council Speaker, to center the needs and voices of cis and trans young women and gender nonconforming young people of color ages 12-24. The Young Women's Advisory Council continues to engage young people in the work of enacting institutional change.

Today, I am here to talk about my school and how its resources have affected my pathway to college.

I am a 17 year old girl, born and raised in the Bronx, a high school junior, and I go to school in Harlem in Chair Benjamin's Senate District. My current principal took over the school in 2015 and I would like to say he has changed the school in a tremendous way, adding extracurricular classes and more after school programs. Although he has positively impacted the school, I can't ignore the fact that the school has certain flaws and lacks certain needed resources. One important resource being that we don't have any SAT prep, especially for the juniors.

Now you may think, why aren't these important things being invested in? I promise you many students have complained about the importance of SAT prep and how they are extremely concerned about not being prepared for it when the date is approaching. I myself am very concerned because the SAT is now less than 3 months away and I have no specific knowledge or preparation for it. It scares me. I don't know anything that is required to pass the SAT and learning that the SAT is what determines whether I get into my dream college or not brings up questions – What happens if I score low? What happens if I fail? Am I a failure in life? What can I look forward to now? Will my future dreams be crushed?

It is tiring for me, a student, to have to ask my school for needed resources, and to keep asking over and over again. We *need* to prepare for this test in order to make it beyond high school.

As another example, I also know that my STEM teachers, like my AP Bio teacher especially, have to buy a lot of the materials and tools for the lab classes. Because of that teacher, his belief in all of his students, and the fact that he cares enough to buy the materials himself, students are able to meet the proper requirements and be engaged in class. I don't think he should be spending any type of money on school supplies, especially when we know teachers aren't valued the way they should be. When I was younger I considered being a teacher, but learning about what they go through, and how they barely get paid for the things that they do, has changed my mind.

I'm at a point in my life where I am planning my future. Just the other day I was with a bunch of seniors at the guidance counselor, asking them questions about the college process and how the SATs are and what curriculum are in the test and a senior replied "well now they took out geometry and put in trigonometry." The expression on my face! The thoughts that crossed my mind – it was like a horror movie! It shouldn't have to be this way.

I should be able to get the proper education and feel confident that I can pursue higher education. A teacher once told me, "There is nothing more lethal than a Black woman who has an education." Unequal funding across schools in New York compromises the education of Black and brown girls, and decreases access to opportunity. This is shameful.

I feel the impact of my school and the schools my friends go to not having access to the resources they need and demand.

I want a better life but it seems as if the school system is here to tear me down. I wake up everyday feeling a heavy weight on my shoulders. I feel as though my education is being taken as a joke. Getting a strong, well-resourced education is a gateway to all my personal goals and successes and it is being tossed aside by the people that hold all the power.

It is my right to get an education. Yet not a lot of people are able to get a *quality* education. Why do I have to *ask* that our schools be well funded? I shouldn't have to ask. Too many people leave school before graduation. Under-resourced schools push people out. We are failing students, but it doesn't have to be this way. You can make that change and give us *all* a quality education.

Thank you.