

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FUNDING CAMPAIGN
Successful Schools . . . Successful Children . . . Successful Communities

Comments by Ron Cowell
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Today marks the introduction of a specific school funding proposal and the launch of a Campaign to support the proposal and to demand action by Governor Rendell and the General Assembly.

Most of the pieces of school reform in Pennsylvania are in place. The General Assembly and three governors have supported the adoption of academic standards that set the academic achievement goals for Pennsylvania's students.....all students in every school district. The governors and General Assembly have put into place an accountability system of assessments and consequences for student performance on schools and, increasingly, on students themselves.

The General Assembly and Governor mandated a Costing-Out Study to identify the educational resources and costs necessary to fully implement these state policies of standards and accountability, and we now have that information.

Yet, we have a statewide funding system that continues to create a very unequal and unfair system of opportunity for students across 501 school districts. It also is a system that is unfair to local taxpayers and makes education funding more dependent on local property taxes than in most states in the nation.

Today's proposal can fix these problems.

But only Governor Rendell and the General Assembly have the authority and the responsibility to enact the state laws that will fix this funding system and give all students a fair opportunity to achieve what state law expects of them.

We know this will not be easy. It would not be easy under any circumstances, in any year. But the size of the gap between current resources and what is required, and the size of the disparity among the 501 school districts, makes all the more compelling the urgency with which Governor Rendell and every legislator must address this issue.

Our goals are straightforward and based on all that has come before, most recently the Costing-Out Study.

The Governor and General Assembly need to put into statute as part of the 2008-2009 state budget a new funding system, based on the costing-out information, with a clearly stated plan and commitment to fully implement the new system within five years. And the 2008-2009 budget must include a substantial first-year payment of at least one billion dollars to begin serious implementation.

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign is an unprecedented coalition to address an unprecedented challenge.

We know that today's proposal is only a beginning. This Campaign, its steering committee and all of its partners, are committed to these goals and to the full implementation and maintenance of a new school funding system that assures fairness to Pennsylvania's students and taxpayers. We recognize and will honor this as a long-term commitment.

We begin this Campaign with some legislators already committed to goals similar to those of the Campaign. We promise these lawmakers, some of whom have worked on these matters for years, that there will be an aggressive public campaign to join with them to promote and accomplish real funding reform.

In fact, most lawmakers and much of the general public already understand that there is a serious problem with the current funding system. But this Campaign will work hard to provide whatever information lawmakers need to understand, debate and act on these important issues. And we will work in every corner of the Commonwealth to build public demand for gubernatorial and legislative action on these issues, and to build public appreciation for those lawmakers, be they the most junior or most senior members, who dare to be leaders on the tough decisions that will confront the General Assembly.

This is a Campaign open to all other statewide, regional and local organizations, and individuals as well, to join as partners, and we reasonably expect this coalition to grow to include a very large number of partners throughout the Commonwealth. Our work will create a public expectation that the Governor and every legislator will accept personal responsibility to support state law that will ensure every student has a fair opportunity to accomplish the academic proficiencies for which these same lawmakers hold schools and students accountable.

Thank you.