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## Don't cut education funds

The future of education is once again being held hostage by our state legislators as they wrestle over Pennsylvania's budget. If we value the future of our state, we need to make our voices heard.

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign (<http://www.paschoolfunding.org>) is an organization working with a coalition of others that have been trying to reach out to our legislators so education does not suffer the budget ax. They need the support of families willing to speak up.

In 2008, the General Assembly took historic action in our state to establish a rational school funding formula based on the recommendations of the Costing-Out Study. For the first time, a significant investment was made in providing more equitable and adequate educational opportunities for Pennsylvania's children.

Providing education to our children is a constitutional mandate in Pennsylvania that never has received adequate state funding. As a result, local communities have carried the burden through property taxes.

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign calls on the governor and General Assembly to maintain their commitment to fully fund the adequacy targets established in Act 61 of 2008 by 2013-14. This begins by adopting a 2009-10 state budget that maintains state funding at current levels and allocates an additional \$418 million in federal stimulus funds through the formula to keep our state on schedule to meet this goal.

Senate Bill 850 would cut \$1 billion from education, taking us back to the funding levels of 2006. In addition, it would make significant cuts to mental health-mental retardation services, health care, and many other vital community services.

House Bill 1416 is better, with \$300 million for education but still not at the \$418 million level that the funding formula requires.

The fact is that the General Assembly will not be able to cut its way out of this budget crisis and will need to raise revenue. The bottom line is that at the end of the day, there will be a budget and it will have to have bipartisan support to pass.

There are many constituents speaking out against an increase in income taxes. There is a much quieter base willing to accept a tax increase for adequate education funding.

Without an income tax increase at the state level, local property taxes could rise to meet school district funding needs, and everyone who owns a home would pay, regardless of their income level or the source of that income.

Those of us who care about the education of Pennsylvania's youth need to strongly support a budget that:

- Does not reduce the state appropriation for basic education.
- Adds \$418 million in federal stimulus money to fund the second year of the plan to keep us on track and on schedule, even if it means an increase in income taxes.

We also need to make sure that provisions are included that do not leave special education funding out of the mix. Last year, special education was left out of the funding formula with the promise that it would be revisited this year.

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