

Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign

Successful Schools...Successful Children...Successful Communities

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PA SENATE SEVERELY UNDERFUNDS EDUCATION *Budget Bill Ignores Findings of General Assembly's Costing-Out Study*

(HARRISBURG), June 18, 2008 - The PA Senate today passed a budget bill along party lines that cuts the governor's proposed basic education funding increase by 41 percent. The bill, which reduces proposed basic education funding by \$118 million, ignores the findings of the General Assembly's own Costing-Out Study that determined the true cost of educating every Pennsylvania child to meet state academic standards.

The Costing-Out Study found that Pennsylvania is under-funding basic education by more than \$4 billion. The study confirmed that Pennsylvania's education system relies too heavily on local property taxes to support our schools, causing widespread inequities in educational opportunities for our children.

The PA School Funding Campaign urges the General Assembly to enact a permanent school funding formula and fully fund it with at least 2.6 billion in additional state funds in no more than six years. The Campaign wants to be clear that it supports Gov. Rendell's funding formula proposal as a necessary starting point for implementing the results of the General Assembly's Costing-Out Study to create a rational, predictable and equitable system of funding basic education.

Despite comments made on the Senate floor, the Senate bill does not provide enough money to address the longstanding inequities in Pennsylvania's broken public education funding system, said Tim Allwein, Assistant Executive Director of Governmental and Member Relations, Pennsylvania School Boards Association. This action comes at a most inopportune time for school districts. They already have prepared their final budgets. The 41 percent cut in proposed funding will mean that many districts will have to go back to the drawing board and start almost from the beginning. More importantly, it means that students will go without the services and opportunities that had been planned for them.

(MORE)

“If the Senate has its way, Pennsylvania will continue to be one of only two states lacking a statewide school funding system and rational funding formula,” said Ron Cowell, president, The Education Policy and Leadership Center. “This action by the Senate is a prescription for less state support, higher school property taxes and even greater disparity of educational opportunity for Pennsylvania’s children, with a large percentage of students denied adequate resources to acquire the academic competencies these same lawmakers say are important.”

“It boggles the mind why legislators commissioned the Costing-Out Study to learn where the deficits are in Pennsylvania’s system of funding its schools but then chose to ignore the findings that point to the need for more funding,” said Joan Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. “Underfunding basic education in the manner prescribed by the Senate maintains the status quo where education opportunities for children vary widely across the state and where school districts are left with few options other than increasing property taxes.”

Pennsylvania voters clearly feel the time has come to change how we fund public education. According to a 2007 Center for Opinion Research Survey, 85 percent of Pennsylvanians support increasing the state share of education funding.

“The Senate’s vote is a step backward for children and public education,” said Pennsylvania State Education Association President James Testerman. “A cut of this magnitude not only will make adoption of a long-term school funding formula much more difficult, but it will deprive many Pennsylvania students of a better education starting this fall. Senate Bill 1389 as approved by the Senate drastically decreases the basic education funding proposed earlier this year. On behalf of PSEA’s 185,000 members, we call upon the General Assembly to restore the \$291 million for basic education in order to provide the critical funding needed to ensure a permanent and predictable school funding formula.”

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign is a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations representing hundreds of thousands of parents, students, educators, school board members, administrators and other concerned citizens advocating for comprehensive, systemic reform of Pennsylvania’s public education funding system.

Visit the Campaign’s web site at www.paschoolfunding.org

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