

Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign

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

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Senate plan balances budget on backs of local taxpayers

The budget plan proposed by Senate Republicans today balances the state budget on the backs of local property taxpayers, according to the Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign.

The plan slashes state funding for K-12 education, and uses federal stimulus funds – proposed by Governor Rendell to increase support for basic education – to instead merely fill the gap created by the shift of state funding to other purposes.

“Senate Republican leaders today released a plan that further shifts responsibility for education from the state to local taxpayers and school districts,” said PSFC spokesman Tim Allwein, Assistant Executive Director, Pennsylvania School Boards Association. “School districts throughout the state are suffering lost revenues and increased costs. This year, more than ever, school districts need state funds to prevent the need to increase the property tax burden on local property owners.”

Joe Bard, speaking for the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, an organization that took the Commonwealth to court for its failure to equitably fund education, said that the proposed “shell game” of cutting state support for education and using those state dollars for other purposes is unconscionable at a time when state support for K-12 education in Pennsylvania already ranks near the bottom among the 50 states.

“Last year, the General Assembly passed the first fair, equitable, and predictable school funding formula in almost twenty years,” Allwein said. “That funding allowed districts

throughout the state to help children with programs that are proven to work: reduced class sizes, tutoring, professional development for teachers, and early childhood education.”

In November of 2007 the state legislature’s Costing Out Study was released, which illustrated that public schools in Pennsylvania were being underfunded by \$4.3 billion. Consequently, the General Assembly enacted a six-year funding commitment to public education, as part of Act 61 of 2008, that ensures school districts will be funded in a more adequate and equitable manner. Based on this six year funding formula, the Governor’s proposed budget and available federal stimulus dollars, school districts now working on next year’s budgets had reason to expect a \$418 million increase for the next school year.

“Last year’s formula also relieved pressure on local property taxes because the state was finally picking up more of its fair share of school funding,” Allwein said. “Forcing districts to raise taxes now is renegeing on the state’s commitment to schools and punishing students and taxpayers.”

Ron Cowell, President of The Education Policy and Leadership Center, and speaking for the PSFC coalition of more than thirty statewide and regional education and advocacy organizations, said that the budget proposed in the Senate “will undo all of the progress accomplished on school funding reform during the past several years.” The PSFC is calling on senators to vote against this proposal and commit themselves to sustaining progress toward a level of state funding for education that is fair to students and local taxpayers.

“Pennsylvania should not put the educational needs of our children on hold until the economy improves,” Allwein said. “Education will help our economy recover and remain strong for generations to come.”