



Our view: Pa. school funding needs more attention

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Some Pennsylvania legislators are calling for a special commission that would draft suggestions for new school funding formulas.

Real reform has been hard to come by in Harrisburg, with voters rejecting the few efforts that have been presented to them.

The current formula shortchanges school districts in fast-growing areas like Franklin County. The state's funding formula, from 1991, does not consider growth.

Reliance on real estate taxes to pay for education also means that school districts don't get equal funding, with wealthy school districts receiving more resources. Per-pupil spending can vary from \$6,000 to \$16,000, according to the Education Policy and Leadership Center in Harrisburg.

According to the center:

- Pennsylvania raises more than 44 percent of its K-12 revenues from property taxes compared to a national average of less than 29 percent.
- The share of K-12 costs paid by state funding in Pennsylvania is just a little more than 35 percent, far below the national average of nearly 50 percent.
- State appropriations per student for K-12 costs in Pennsylvania are more than \$400 per student below the national average, \$300 below neighboring Ohio, and between \$1,500 to \$3,500 below other nearby states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York and West Virginia.)

Over the years, the state government has passed on to local school districts an increasing share of the costs, including special education. Because local districts have had to pay a greater share of education costs, school boards have been saddled with raising taxes frequently.

And over the years, legislators have tried -- and failed -- to deliver real reform that school districts and voters will accept.

Perhaps it will take a special commission or some other concerted effort to come up with solutions.

While solutions have been difficult to come by, it's clear that Pennsylvania needs to establish a more equitable education funding system.

State legislators shouldn't keep passing the buck.

-- *By Kathy Leedy, written on behalf of Public Opinion's editorial board*