

## **Editorial: Residents cut class on education funding**

There's an old saying about how a picture says 1,000 words. Too bad it can't produce as many bodies.

If you still have the newspaper handy, take a close look at the photo that appears on Page 10 of Wednesday's Daily Times.

Yep, a picture certainly does say 1,000 words. Or maybe more correctly 1,000 empty seats.

They held a public hearing Tuesday night on one of the most important issues in Delaware County. Almost no one showed up. And those that did were for the most part those with a vested interest in the issue.

People wonder why, despite the complaints that we hear daily about the bane of property taxes and the inequities of how this state funds its education system, nothing seems to get done on this vital issue.

Take another gander at that picture. There's your answer.

Sometimes you just have to shake your head. Not a day goes by that this newspaper does not field phone calls from those who want to complain about rising property taxes.

It is part of the "Twin Towers" of the education dilemma in this state, the fact that local school districts, facing a general decline in state subsidies for education, are depending increasingly on local property taxes to foot the bill. The other half is the seeming unbalanced system that sees well-off districts thrive, while those in poorer regions continue to suffer.

Senior citizens in particular have raised their voices, along with some school board members, about the effect rising property taxes are having on local communities.

Finally, this fall, the Legislature got some concrete numbers to serve as a starting point for education funding reform. At the urging of several education groups in the state, the Legislature ordered a costing-out study to examine school funding in the state.

It was a unique look at the problem, in that it sought to determine the amount each district should be spending to give every one of their students an adequate education in keeping with state standards.

The results are about what you would expect. The state is seriously under-funding education, to the tune of \$4.8 billion. The study indicates that districts should be spending \$12,057 per pupil to offer an adequate education. Not many are.

In Delaware County, only 12 of 15 districts meet that threshold. Statewide, only about 27 of 501 districts hit the mark.

All of which is nice to know. But without action, it's merely words on paper, another effort to reform the system that is doomed to go nowhere.

Which is why in addition to ordering the costing-out study, a series of public hearings was set up across the state to detail and explain the findings.

Tuesday night they came to the Upper Darby Performing Arts Center. By the looks of things, they could have held it in a classroom.

The public, the same public that complains so vociferously about school spending and any increase in their tax bills, stayed away in droves.

They missed an opportunity to take part in what easily could be the most important issue in the county and state.

They missed an opportunity to hear state Rep. Nick Micozzie, R-163, one of the few members of the Legislature who has offered a specific alternative on education funding, warn that this latest effort could wind up as just so much hot air in Harrisburg.

State Rep. Mario Civera, R-164, another Upper Darby Republican who represents communities wracked by increasing property taxes, told those few assembled that the study had the potential to bring the issue to the forefront in the state Capitol.

Before that can happen, it has to be in the forefront of every resident, every home owner, every renter.

By the looks of the attendance at Tuesday's hearing, that effort still has a ways to go.