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PPA GETS FAT, STUDENTS STARVE

\$1 MILLION MORE TO SCHOOLS ISN'T ENOUGH

A STUDY commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education that determined the true cost of educating our students to achieve the performance expected of them is a notable accomplishment.

The report identified precisely how far we are falling short in providing the necessary funds to schools around the state to adequately educate our children. It found that the average cost estimate per student to achieve proficiency in math and reading in Pennsylvania is \$12,057; the state actually spent \$9,512 per student, a total shortfall of more than \$4 billion.

The report is exhaustive in its detail, and the research is impressive. Still, there's only a single line that Philadelphians need to remember:

The state underfunds Philadelphia schools by about \$5,000 *per pupil*.

This confirms what many - including the school district - have said for years, and provides the simplest explanation yet for the missing link between our educational aspirations and the more disappointing reality.

We hope that now we have a precise, credible figure for just how much our schools need - \$5,000 more per pupil in Philadelphia - our elected leaders will work to figure out how to close the gap.

We couldn't help repeating this \$5,000 figure over and over as we reviewed the testimony of Vincent Fenerty, head of the Philadelphia Parking Authority, in Harrisburg before a committee panel meeting on authority operations. We also marveled at the coincidence of this meeting falling on the same day the school costing-out study was released.

The Parking Authority meeting, called by the Appropriations Committee led by Rep. Dwight Evans, was prompted by reports over the last few weeks of an agency that has, since the state took it over in 2001, doubled the number of employees, including the ranks of highly-compensated executives, and has failed to deliver to the schools the promised rewards of state takeover.

When then-Majority Leader John Perzel, R-Phila., orchestrated the hostile takeover of the Parking Authority from the city, he claimed it could mean \$45 million to the schools. He has since sprained his leg muscles back-pedaling from this original claim, claiming he wasn't aware that federal regulations prohibit airport parking revenues from leaving the airport, and thus could not go to the schools. In all, the authority has given \$4 million to the schools. Meanwhile, the authority has doubled its staff, continued to increase revenues, and gives top executives perks like gas-guzzling, taxpayer-funded SUVs.

Gov. Rendell has ordered an audit of the authority's executive salaries. The panel did vote last week to earmark the \$1 million in annual revenues from red-light cameras to go directly to the school district. Which, by our math, should help 200 students get the education they need. That leaves 180,000 more who won't. *