



Siptroth school funding plan clears Pa. House committee

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A Monroe County lawmaker's push to overhaul the state's school financing formula advanced out of the House Education committee Wednesday.

House Resolution 460, which was introduced in October by Rep. John Siptroth, D-189, would create a commission to act on the widely anticipated "costing-out" study that was released last month.

That study sought to identify the true cost of meeting student performance targets, which was defined as having all students test at grade level in reading and math by 2014. This is the goal set by federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

The study also set a standard per-student cost that should be used across the state, based on studies of successful districts, and other factors.

According to the consultants' calculations, the state would need to spend an additional \$4.8 billion per year on public school education to help school districts meet those goals.

Advocates for school funding reform have said the study was sorely needed because districts spent vastly different sums on education.

Locally, the study has been seen as necessary because the current system essentially fixes relative levels of education funding where they were in 1991.

While districts experiencing growth have received additional money on top of annual, across-the-board increases, the underlying system remains.

As a result, fast-growing areas like Monroe and Pike counties have complained that their per-pupil share of funding has shrunk to less than a quarter of their budgets.

"There are other districts with similar challenges and some with different burdens to bear," Siptroth said in a statement, "so fully vetting the results of the costing-out study needs to be the first step in correcting the funding problem and closing the funding gap."

The commission established by the resolution would be charged with devising at least two systems of distributing state money.

These systems would need to be both adequate and fair, responsive to demographic changes in districts, and linked to consequences if students do not meet academic standards.

Forty-one people would serve on the commission, including members of the General Assembly, cabinet secretaries, school board directors, classroom teachers and parents of students enrolled in public schools, as well as education experts and members of child advocacy organizations.

It would also look for ways to cut costs and boost cooperation between nearby districts.

Members would have to meet within two months of being appointed, and the commission would have to report its findings within one year of its first meeting.

The resolution, a joint effort with Rep. Beverly Mackereth, R-196, goes to the full House for consideration.