

For Immediate Release

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Education advocates congratulate House Education Committee on taking first step toward enacting new school funding formula; Encourage General Assembly to follow suit

Harrisburg, Pa. (June 4, 2008) – Members of the State House Education Committee cast an overwhelming vote of support for enacting a new school funding formula today, when, by a vote of 23-5, they moved House Bill 2449, the legislation to create Pennsylvania’s first school funding formula since the early 1990s, through the education committee.

At stake in HB 2449, introduced by Rep. James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia), is a new school funding formula that uses the General Assembly’s costing-out study as the benchmark for calculating every school district’s need based on factors like enrollment, number of low income students and English language learners, district size and regional cost differences.

“The passage of HB 2449 today by members of the House Education Committee serves as a vote of confidence in the new school funding formula proposed by Gov. Rendell,” said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania. “We are encouraged that as the General Assembly moves further into budget negotiations, support for real, systemic education funding reform is gaining traction.”

“The proposal for a new school funding formula presents an historic opportunity for school districts and students across Pennsylvania.” said Baruch Kintisch, staff attorney for the Education Law Center, an organization that advocates on behalf of students living in poverty, with disabilities, or who are learning English. “For the first time, the new formula takes into account the real needs of schools and students to ensure that every district has the opportunity to provide every student with a high quality education.”

Based on the principles of accountability, adequacy, efficiency, equity and predictability, which the National Council of State Legislatures outlined as essential for a sound school funding formula, the school funding formula in HB 2449 begins by assessing each district’s adequacy gap – the difference between funding available and what is needed to reach adequacy and is calculated by assessing local wealth and tax burden to determine the state’s share of funding.

The funding formula proposal in HB 2449 also includes measures to ensure that new resources are used in ways that best lead to improvements for students, such as extended school day, smaller classes, pre-K and full-day kindergarten, and qualified teachers and principals.

Rendell is proposing that the state invest \$2.6 billion over the next six years to help all school districts reach their adequacy targets, with a down-payment of \$291 million in the 2008-09 budget.

“As Gov. Rendell said in his budget address, ‘this is the best opportunity in a generation to adequately fund public education in Pennsylvania,’” said Risch. “As such, we applaud education committee members for their bold leadership and foresight in passing HB 2449.”

A companion bill, Senate Bill 1338, will also be considered in the Senate before legislators from both chambers negotiate to enact a final budget for fiscal year 2008-09.

“Now we urge the General Assembly to follow suit and promptly enact the new funding formula as part of this year’s budget,” concluded Kintisch.

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