

Good Schools Pennsylvania

For Immediate Release

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Education Advocates applaud State House members for passage of public school finance study commission; Encourage Senate to follow suit

Harrisburg, Pa. (January 16, 2008) – Members of the State House cast an overwhelming vote of support for education finance reform yesterday, when, by a tally of 192-2, they passed House Resolution 460, the proposal to create a Joint Legislative Commission on Public School Finance.

The 41-member joint legislative commission will be composed of members of the General Assembly, cabinet secretaries, school board officials, education experts, parents, educators and business leaders, and will be charged with analyzing and assessing the best evidence and models of school funding systems and using the recently-released statewide education costing-out study to craft recommendations for reforming the state's education funding formula for adoption by the General Assembly. Members of the commission will also conduct hearings around the state to foster public understanding and support for public education finance reform. The resolution will require that the commission report its recommendations within the year.

“The passage of House Resolution 460 today by members of the House ensures that the costing-out study won't simply sit on a shelf,” said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania. “The creation and appointment of the joint commission will guarantee that education finance reform efforts continue to gain momentum.”

“The formation of the commission is also important for helping to develop comprehensive, statewide solutions for funding reform that will also provide real, long-term property tax relief,” 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.

House Resolution 460 was introduced by State Representatives John Siptroth (D-189) and Beverly Mackereth (R-196) in October and received broad bi-partisan support in the General Assembly. Senator Pat Browne (R-Lehigh) introduced a similar proposal, Senate Resolution 210, in November.

Both proposals were introduced to address Pennsylvania's first costing-out study, commissioned by the General Assembly, and released by the State Board of Education on November 14.

The costing-out analysis found that \$11,926 is the average level of funding required to ensure that every student reaches state standards of academic achievement. The study

identified a base cost per student of \$8,003 and the additional funding needed to close the achievement gap for students in poverty, English language learners, and children with special needs. The base cost amount was also adjusted to further close the resource gap for districts that are growing, rural or faced with other educational challenges. Overall, the study found that 471 out of 501 school districts in Pennsylvania are currently spending below their adequacy levels, and Pennsylvania's system of public education is underfunded by \$4.38 billion (25.4 percent more than current spending).

"We expect that the work of the joint commission will result in a broadly supported recommendation for a new statewide funding system based on the principles of adequacy, accountability, efficiency, equity and predictability," said Kintisch.

Education advocates are also encouraging immediate action from the Governor and General Assembly to address Pennsylvania's school funding crisis. "We hope that the 2008-09 budget will be used to make a firm commitment and significant progress to address the needs identified by the costing-out study" added Kintisch.

"We applaud lawmakers for their bold leadership in passing House Resolution 460," concluded Risch. "We urge members of the Senate to follow suit and act promptly to approve Senate Resolution 210 to put into place another important tool to help build an effective school funding system in Pennsylvania."

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