



For Immediate Release:
June 5, 2007

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Advocates call on General Assembly To Prioritize Public Education in 2007-08 Budget, Work on Long-Term Solution to School Funding Crisis

(Harrisburg, PA) Citizens came from several parts of the state today to call on members of the General Assembly to make public education a priority in the 2007-08 state budget, as well as to show leadership in using the results of a state-wide costing-out study to develop a sound school funding formula.

“Pennsylvania continues to have one of the nation’s most ineffective and unfair systems of funding public education,” said Janis Risch, executive director, Good Schools Pennsylvania. “Because Pennsylvania’s share of public education support has been so low for so long, the increases of the past few years have served primarily to prevent further decline in on school finance system. The General Assembly must treat the governor’s proposed education budget as a floor in negotiations; not the ceiling.”

Speakers at a press conference held Tuesday by the group cited conditions in Pennsylvania’s schools rivaling the deplorable conditions exposed earlier this year at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and traced those conditions back to Pennsylvania’s broken system of school funding, as evidenced by the following indicators:

- Pennsylvania ranks among the bottom nationally when it comes to state share of school costs: in 2004-05, the state share of school costs funded by the state budget amounted to 36.0%. Nationally, the average is closer to 50% paid by state governments, the level in Pennsylvania in the 1970’s.
- The amount of state appropriations on a per pupil basis also lags the national average by several hundred dollars per student, and lags neighboring states by as much as \$2,500 per student.
- Because of insufficient state funding, public education in Pennsylvania is excessively dependent on local wealth and local taxes, with the result that the quality of educational opportunity for children varies widely.
- Nationally, about 29% of school district revenues come from local property taxes. In Pennsylvania, 44% of school district revenues come from property taxes making Pennsylvania excessively dependent on property taxes as a result of inadequate state support.
- There is a \$10,259 gap between what the highest and lowest spending school districts in Pennsylvania spend per pupil on current expenditures. The highest spending district spent \$18,064 per student in 2004-2005; the lowest only \$6,991. This translates into a \$276,825 gap per classroom of 25 students.
- It is many of the poorest school districts that have the highest tax rates, yet still do not have adequate levels of funding to ensure a high quality education is available to students.

As Ed Maritz, a school director from Sto-Rox School District in Allegheny County reflected, the impact on his community of the closing of steel mills was exponentially compounded by the school district’s dependence on a declining property tax base to fund the schools. But he urged legislators not to confuse property tax relief with a real solution.

“Yes, we need property tax relief in Sto-Rox School District,” Maritz said, “but most importantly, we need the state to ensure that adequate funds are available to all school districts, and that the tax burden for supporting public education is distributed more equitably across the Commonwealth.”

Participants at the press conference expressed hope that the results of a statewide costing out study, due in November of this year, will lay the foundation for a sound school funding formula.

“The statewide costing-out study should provide us with irrefutable evidence about what kind of resources it takes to prepare all students to be successful,” Risch said. “The ball will be in the General Assembly’s court to find a way to implement it.”

For more information on Good Schools Pennsylvania position on the 2007-08 education budget, click [here](#).

Goods Schools Pennsylvania supports the fundamental right of all children to a high quality public education. Our mission is to build a network of citizens who are informed and mobilized for comprehensive education reform, including: adequate funds that are fairly distributed, use of proven educational practices to meet a standard of excellence, and accountability measures to ensure every child is given an opportunity to achieve at high levels. For information visit our website at www.goodschoolspa.org.

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