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Basic Education Funding Commission Releases a Proposal that Could Make a Life-Changing Difference for Pennsylvania Students

The proposal sets targets for adequate funding—\$5.4 billion statewide—in every school district, based on student need and current spending in successful districts

Joint statement from Education Law Center PA and the Public Interest Law Center

Today, the Basic Education Funding Commission took the first step towards developing a public school funding system based on what students need statewide—not on local wealth. We applaud the commissioners for taking their constitutional duty seriously, and putting forward and adopting [a plan](#) that, if fully implemented, would make a life-changing difference for our students.

The task before us is clear: Governor Shapiro and the legislative leaders who advanced this transformative proposal must turn this plan into action. This year, we must take real steps to end Pennsylvania’s unconstitutional two-tiered public school funding system and the denial of basic resources to hundreds of thousands of students.

Commonwealth Court was clear: “All witnesses agree that every child can learn. It is now the obligation of the Legislature, Executive Branch, and educators, to make the constitutional promise a reality in this Commonwealth.”

For decades, this duty has been ignored, with state funding for public schools based on political convenience. But today’s proposal shows that many legislative leaders, and Governor Shapiro, are ready to keep this constitutional promise to our children.

What the commission’s report proposes

The Commission set a measured and meaningful target for what it would cost for every school district to provide the comprehensive, effective, and contemporary public education required by the constitution and affirmed by Commonwealth Court’s decision. The \$5.4 billion target for adequate funding statewide would increase total public education funding statewide by 17% over seven years, targeted to students in low-wealth districts that have been shortchanged for decades.

It is based on what the school districts who meet Pennsylvania’s academic goals are currently spending, excluding only high-spending outliers. The target includes special education, classroom instruction, remedial support, career and technical education, principals, and counselors—the same essential resources our current system denies to students in low-wealth districts, as the court decision found.

Seven years is a longer wait than our students should face, and we believe this target should be met before our middle schoolers graduate high school. But this target is the start of a public

school funding system that provides our students with the support they need to reach their potential—what they deserve, and legally must receive.

In addition to creating a fund for closing adequacy gaps, the proposal would provide a \$200 million annual increase through the current Basic Education Funding formula, ensuring that all districts will see state funding increases.

This proposal is not perfect. It includes \$300 million as Pennsylvania’s first meaningful state investment in school facilities in nearly a decade, but that is just a small down-payment on an immense need for safe and healthy facilities identified by Commonwealth Court. The report also does not include investments in PreK education that the court identified as fundamental to a constitutional public education system. We urge legislators and the Governor to work together to address these essential needs for our students.

We are hopeful that the coming state budget will include a concrete plan to make this proposal a reality—including a substantial first-year commitment and firm funding targets year-by-year—so that our educators can plan, our leaders can be held accountable, and our students can be sure to see the benefits.

A minority of Republican commission members released their own report, which was not adopted by the Commission. It does not attempt to determine the funding public schools need to meet the standard set by Commonwealth Court’s decision—which the Commission itself committed to responding to. That decision was released nearly a year ago, and it was not appealed. The Commission held 11 public hearings in every corner of the state. The time for action is now, and we are hopeful that all legislators recognize their constitutional duty to ensure that every student receives an effective, comprehensive, contemporary education that our state Constitution requires.

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