

Another View

Lawmakers should pass costing-out funding ...

By Joseph A. Lewis And John Callahan

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There is no question that the quality of our public educational systems is the single most important economic development strategy for any city or state. Gov. Ed Rendell has proposed a comprehensive plan to give our local schools the funds they need to cover the short falls illustrated in the state's Costing-Out Study. This study, commissioned by the Legislature, examines the funding necessary for all our children in the Bethlehem area and the entire state to reach proficient student achievement levels by 2014.

We are calling on our legislators to enact the school funding proposal prior to their summer recess. For the Bethlehem Area School District, this plan calls for a new state investment of \$23 million by the year 2014 or a 105 percent increase. Imagine for a moment the tremendous impact of smaller class sizes, extended tutoring and intervention programs, and the infusion of technology that these dollars could bring, not to mention the importance of lowering property taxes across the state. For the Bethlehem Area School District, these dollars would be the equivalent of 10 mills in taxes.

The mayors of our great state and the city superintendents have joined together to accept the challenge of publicizing this issue. We feel the governor's proposal will create solid economic growth by offering businesses a world-class workforce while giving our students the skills they need to become our future workers and entrepreneurs.

While we could debate the value or non-value of No Child Left Behind, what is more important to note is that our schools are making progress each and every day. More significantly, we desperately need these resources so that all our children meet with success in their educational experience.

The governor's plan calls for a phase in of \$2.6 billion in new state funding for education over the next six years. Implementing a law that guarantees this funding is the only way we can be assured that adequate dollars will be available to meet our students needs. New school funding will only have an impact if it affects our children's growth in the classroom. This is why it is important that these dollars are invested in best practices that are proven to yield results.

As mentioned previously, the legislators took a bold step in implementing this Cost-Out Study. However, this needs to be more than a report that sits on a shelf and gathers dust. The funding of Pennsylvania schools has been seriously flawed for over two decades. If

we truly believe that economic growth and quality education are synonymous, then it is imperative that we ask all our legislators to get behind the governor's initiative and support our public schools. Gov. Rendell's proposal is our last best hope that our schools can produce the citizens, workers and entrepreneurs who will guarantee the future economic stability of our cities, boroughs and municipalities, and ultimately our state.

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