



Local legislators seek solutions for school funding

CARL LINDQUIST *The York Dispatch*

Article Last Updated: 06/06/2008 11:30:06 AM EDT

New ideas could help address opposition to the proposed new education funding formula for Pennsylvania.

York City and other school districts across the state that spend the least on a per-student basis could get big bucks under the proposal.

But other districts that are already spending more, such as Dallastown and York Suburban, wouldn't see anywhere near as much money.

That could create problems getting the new formula through the General Assembly and into the hands of Gov. Ed Rendell. The state House Education Committee passed the measure Wednesday.

However, the possibility of a battle looms between lawmakers who represent districts set to gain the most money and those who represent districts in line for the least.

Ideas: At least two ideas are circulating that could entice the support of more school districts and, in turn, their lawmakers.

Rep. Ron Miller, R-Jacobus, wants to address a problem he says exists in districts with pockets of rich people such as Dallastown and York Suburban.

Those districts, along with the Southern York County School District, stand to gain the least of all York County school districts under the new formula.

Income levels are used to help determine the affluence of a district, which influences how much the districts would get under the new formula, Miller said.

Under the new formula, rich people in a district make it look more affluent than it is. That would result in less state student funding, in turn forcing the district to rely more heavily than others on property tax for revenue.

While additional property tax doesn't have much impact on the richest, it strains the budget of those who don't make much money, Miller said.

"It hurts the little old lady living on a fixed income," he said.

Miller wants to eliminate the incomes of the richest and poorest in the calculation to determine affluence, but he's not yet sure how much difference it will make.

"I don't know how it plays out," he said. "The question is how we get the data to figure it and know what it means."

Incentive: Perhaps a more straightforward idea is to simply promise more money to the school districts that stand to gain the least.

State Rep. Bev Mackereth, R-Spring Grove, said no annual inflationary increase in state funding for school districts is included in the formula. A member of the House Education Committee, Mackereth said lawmakers nonetheless expect one to continue as tradition.

One way to attract the support of districts that stand to gain the least under the new formula is to simply give them a bigger annual inflationary increase, she said.

Otherwise, some school districts would be looking at years of no increase at all after 2008-2009, she said. Even Mackereth, a staunch advocate for school funding reform, wouldn't vote for the new formula if she represented a district in that situation, she said.

Dallastown responds: Dallastown Area School Board President Don Yoder said the new formula presents a variety of problems for the district.

Among them is the wealth issue described by Miller, he said.

Plus, the new formula doesn't compensate enough for growth, which will force the district to rely more heavily on property tax than others, Yoder said.

The Legislature needs to start anew and take a fresh look at school funding, he said.

"I personally feel that while this is in the right direction, this is not the right bill," he said.

-- Reach Carl Lindquist at 505-5432 or clindquist@yorkdispatch.com.

THE YORKDISPATCH.com

© 2005-2007 Copyright The York Dispatch