



March 14, 2025

Dr. Carrie Rowe, Acting Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street, 10th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Secretary Rowe:

Release of the details on the school funding proposals contained in Governor Shapiro's state budget plan has created concern and consternation among rural school officials and taxpayers across the state as the amount of increase fails to provide meaningful assistance for bringing on personnel, acquiring technology, or bolstering curriculum to help meet student performance standards. **We would like to invite you to a community conversation in April, before we get too deep into the legislative process, to listen to their perspectives and recommendations.**

We intend this to be a constructive fact-finding and solution-oriented event. There are pointed questions from both advocates and opponents of public education about what Harrisburg intends to do, governor and state legislators alike. And we believe the public deserves to hear from someone who is pivotal in determining and carrying out state education policies.

While the forum would be open to all districts confronting funding disparities, Northwest Area School District would be an outstanding host for this discussion. To their credit, the superintendent, school officials, and community leaders are already asking people to focus on reasonable steps that could be taken to alleviate the financial pressure. Consistent with this, many of the communications we are receiving are thoughtful assessments of the difficulties faced and respectful requests for intervention by state legislators and administration officials.

With this second year of funding under the new adequacy and equity formulas, it is apparent that no single approach can satisfy the diverse student populations and economic circumstances of 500 school districts. We have seen how larger districts could use their substantial funding increases to attract veteran instructors away from districts already functioning on lean operating budgets.

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We must work towards a quality education and student success for all our schools. The closer we move toward a per pupil funding system, the farther districts in small communities and rural areas are from being able to cope with the demographic and economic changes carrying extreme consequences for both basic and higher education.

As much as we all would like to achieve efficiencies wherever possible to make funding stretch further, there are a lot of places where economies of scale simply do not graft onto the fixed costs every district – urban, suburban, and rural – must contend with. One cost impacting all districts across the Commonwealth is cyber charter funding, and this must be part of the conversation.

It is incumbent on all the players involved in the state budget process to devise a remedy that will provide help this year and for budgets to come. Your insights and suggestions can be very useful as we work to figure out how to enable this district and others to have the resources necessary to do the best job by their students.

Thank you for consideration of this urgent request. Know that we are willing to work with your schedule to identify a day and time for our community conversation. We look forward to your favorable reply.

Sincerely,



Senator Lisa Baker
20th Senatorial District



Senator Lynda Schlegel Culver
27th Senatorial District

pc: Steven Latanishen, Legislative Liaison
Pennsylvania Department of Education