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Plan could help close financial gap in Baldwin-Whitehall schools

By Genea Webb
FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Thursday, July 3, 2008



Members of the Baldwin-Whitehall Council of PTAs and their children traveled to Harrisburg recently in an effort to secure increased support for the school district's students and programs.

The initiative -- Eyes on Education Action Day -- focused on a bill passed in early June by the House Education Committee that would establish a new formula on which the funding of school districts would be based.

According to a news release from Good Schools Pennsylvania and the Education Law Center, the committee voted 23-5 in favor of a bill that would create the first new school funding formula since the early 1990s. It would calculate district needs based on factors such as enrollment, number of low-income students, English language learners, district size and regional cost differences.

It begins by defining each district's "adequacy gap," the difference between available funding and what is needed to operate adequately.

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"Right now, we have funding based on 1991 enrollment with a 2 percent cost of living increase," said Susan Hayhurst of the Baldwin-Whitehall Council of PTAs. "We have a large number of English as a Second Language students, and we have about 24 percent of children below the poverty level.

"When the children come to the school district, we have to get paraprofessionals to work with them and that hurts the budget because the money has to come from somewhere," Hayhurst said.

The Harrisburg gathering included meetings with legislators to discuss the need for greater equity and accountability regarding education funding.

"The proposal for a new school funding formula presents an historic opportunity for school districts and students across Pennsylvania," said Baruch Kintisch, staff attorney for the Education Law Center, which advocates on behalf of students with disabilities, in poverty or learning English. "For the first time, the new formula takes into account the real needs of schools and students to ensure that every district has the opportunity to provide every student with a high quality education."

The Eyes on Education Action Day was directed by Good Schools

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Pennsylvania, a group that was created in 2001 to help bridge the gap of educational opportunity across the state.

"This is the best opportunity in a generation to adequately fund public education in Pennsylvania," said the organization's executive director, Janis Risch.

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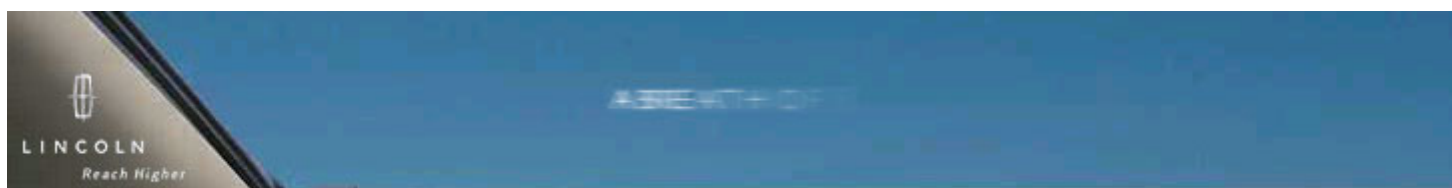
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