

CITY OF BETHLEHEM

Inter-Office Memorandum

SUBJECT: Resolution in Support of Fair Funding Formula for Pennsylvania Schools
TO: Members of City Council
FROM: J. William Reynolds, Member of City Council
DATE: January 8, 2019

Attached is a proposed resolution encouraging the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to enact legislation making the distribution of state education funding more equitable by reducing per-pupil funding disparities between poorer and wealthier districts. I would ask the Members of Council to please consider the attached resolution at the City Council Meeting on Tuesday, January 15, 2019.

In 2016, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signed legislation that established a fair funding formula for the allocation of funds to Pennsylvania’s public school districts. Governor Wolf’s action followed the creation of the Basic Education Funding (BEF) Formula (“Fair Funding Formula”) which was unanimously adopted by the bipartisan state Basic Education Funding Commission in June 2015. This formula takes into account local district factors including, among others, percentage of students living in poverty, current level of district taxation, number of English Language Learners, and financial impact of charter schools, when determining the correct amount of state funding.

How bad is Pennsylvania in the area of equitable education funding?

A 2015 Washington Post study found that Pennsylvania’s state and local per-pupil spending in its poorest school districts is 33 percent lower than per-pupil spending in the state’s most affluent school districts, nearly double that of the next worse state and the highest differential in the United States.

Here in Bethlehem, Dr. Joseph J. Roy, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools, Bethlehem Area School District (BASD), has consistently pointed out that the BASD is currently receiving approximately \$23 million less annually than the Fair Funding Formula would allocate to the district. This shortfall hurts Bethlehem students by depriving them of the educational resources they so desperately need and absolutely deserve.

Why should City Council consider this Resolution now?

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate just swore in a number of new legislators who are strong advocates for public education. Thus, there is optimism that this legislative session will move at a quicker pace to fix financial inequities that have been affecting the BASD and other school districts for decades. Moreover, Governor Wolf is planning to introduce his 2019-2020 state budget in February 2019. Passing this Resolution will send a strong message to state legislators and public education advocates that the City of Bethlehem demands fair and equitable funding of the state's vital public education system.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions pertaining to this memo or the Resolution. There are also supplemental documents outlining important additional information on this issue.



J. William Reynolds, Member of City Council

CC: Members of Council
J. Spirk, Jr., Esq.
Mayor
Governor Tom Wolf
Senator Lisa M. Boscola
Representative Steve Samuelson
Representative Jeanne McNeill
Dr. Joseph J. Roy, Ed.D

RESOLUTION NO. 2019 -

WHEREAS, by some measures, Pennsylvania's per-pupil education funding inequity between wealthier and poorer school districts is one of the worst in the United States;

WHEREAS, in 2016, Pennsylvania enacted a Basic Education Funding Formula for the equitable distribution of state funding to local school districts that takes into account district-specific and community factors such as poverty rates, enrollment rates, and tax base (the "Fair Funding Formula");

WHEREAS, in 2018, less than 10% of Pennsylvania's total education budget was actually distributed to school districts based on application of the Fair Funding Formula;

WHEREAS, the Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) receives approximately \$23,000,000 less annually from the state than it would if all its funding was routed through the Fair Funding Formula; and

WHEREAS, the Council of the City of Bethlehem believes that this annual shortfall harms BASD students relative to students from wealthier and less diverse districts and that all students deserve a quality education supported by adequate funding.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Bethlehem hereby requests the State House and Senate pass legislation in support of the full implementation of the Fair Funding Formula by rerouting all or substantially more state basic education dollars through the formula;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the disparate effects of the "hold harmless" provision of state funding to school districts should be addressed, because the practice perpetuates historic funding inequities between wealthier and poorer school districts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of the Resolution be sent to elected state officials in the Lehigh Valley asking for support of such measures.

Sponsored by:

ADOPTED by Council this day of , 2019.

President of Council

ATTEST:

City Clerk