

Testimony of Brenda Morales

Good morning. My name is Brenda Morales, I am a leader with Power Interfaith and a retired School District of Lancaster educator. I taught English as a Second Language for 22 years in the district. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of students and teachers.

Why do we need a better funding formula, one that fully and fairly funds all schools? We don't have enough time for me to explain all the reasons, so I'll sprint through a few things that I would like to see change.

Facilities with appropriate temperature. You can't imagine how miserable it is to work in extreme heat or cold. I used to keep a pile of sweatshirts for days when the boiler system was acting up, but there wasn't anything I could do on super-hot day. Studies have found that extreme temperatures impact a student's (and teacher's) ability to focus.

Class size. Imagine 30 third grade students. I co-taught in a class of that size. Believe me when I say that is a lot of children. Children with fewer chances to interact with their teacher. Fewer chances to get help. And lower academic success as a result.

Better lunches. My husband went to Reynolds Middle School in the 80s. He said the lunch was never enough, he was still hungry. For some kids, my husband was one of them, school breakfast and lunch is the only reliable food they get. We need to make the lunches taste better and have larger portions for the older students.

Finally, English Learners, also called ELs. The School District of Lancaster has nearly 2000 ELs or about 16% of the student population. This is a challenging group to work with because of the diversity of their previous schooling and their life experiences. A migrant student from Guatemala is very different from a Congolese refugee or a student from Puerto Rico who had a good education there. Yet, they are in the same class.

ELs, especially beginners, need smaller classes. For several years, I had beginner classes of 14 or 15 students. Sometimes, my ESL class was larger than the regular English class. It was extremely difficult to meet the needs of that many students.

I know that many people think we already spend too much money on education and think we don't need an increase. I would like to remind everyone of the \$800 million budget cuts in 2011. I remember colleagues finding out they were no longer employed. We lost nurses, librarians, Spanish teachers, PE teachers. Schools in the School District of Lancaster still share librarians and nurses. We have yet to make up for that deficit in funding. This is why we need full and fair funding. To ensure the students in districts like the School District of Lancaster have the same advantages as students in rich suburban schools.

A proponent of public education that is important to Lancaster County was Thaddeus Stevens. He left money to create a school for indigent orphans, with no preference based on race, religion, or ethnicity. He also spoke in defense of public education, saying it is a matter of public concern and a duty the government owes its citizens. He further said that the blessing of education should be for all children, that the poorest child needs to be prepared to take part as an educated citizen.

I ask that the members of the Commission ensure that these ideals continue and that every child has access to the best possible education. Thank you.