



Testimony to the Basic Education Educational Funding Panel

September 12, 2023 at 10:00 AM, Allentown Pennsylvania

Dr. Jack P. Silva, Superintendent of the Bethlehem Area School District

The focus is to be upon how to ensure the delivery of **equitable, adequate, and timely education resources & reform on the part of the state.**

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this panel discussion—the topics are of significant importance to the students, families, faculty & staff, and the future of the entire community of the Bethlehem Area School District. Delivering equitable, adequate, and timely educational funding is a very tall order that requires commitment and innovation on many different parties.

Of course, there is a huge financial context to this issue. Ultimately, it will require additional resources to develop and implement a roadmap to achieve the constitutional full funding formula as per the decision of the State Supreme Court. To quote H.L. Mencken, “When you hear somebody say, this is not about money, it’s about money,” so we will have to make some financial choices. Here are the choices that I would recommend from my seat as Superintendent of the Bethlehem Area School District.

Re-Establish a Few Things that were working before they were reduced or eliminated. These are not new programs, just funding certain things that once had state funding and bi-partisan support

- Re-establish some re-imbusement of charter school tuition expenses (BASD \$38 million)—allows a greater percentage of the local community’s resources to be spent on that community’s children. Such reform of charter school tuition should include only reimbursing a charter school only for its actual expenses in terms of special education services.
- Re-establish some funding for college dual enrollment tuition for high need students. BASD career pathways.
- Re-establish Plan Con payments for school construction projects. The BASD Capital Plan

Beyond Re-establishing Previous State Supports to Address Newer Challenges

The teachers themselves: Certification – finding and incentivizing new teachers. Student teachers, Instructional Assistants, grow your own programs, competitive salaries for urban/rural teachers

Being Ready for School: the Community School Model support of families and students' basic needs.

- Food Insecurity –food pantries, clothing closets
- Housing Insecurity – housing navigator to reduce mobility
- Health supports: vaccinations, vision vans, access to medical care, access to mental health services, parent education programming, mentorship programs
- Employment Assistance linked to Affordable Childcare
- Language and Legal Services
- Enough Access to Internet

Getting to School: Attendance –combat chronic absence. Parent education, Home Visitors, expanded transportation options, summer and afterschool programs

While at School –improving teaching and learning

Improve literacy—using evidence-based practices; training of teachers and principals, modern curriculum, assessment, and data systems to improve instruction. RBG3.

Support Career Pathway Partnerships—focused programs of study in high school connected with organizations in the local economy

Support Vocational Technical Education – facilities and equipment. Support ‘Go Pro Early’ programming.

To conclude, I am both an educator and taxpayer in my own community, so the State definitely has the obligation to insist that funding be conditioned to tried-and-true, evidence-based solutions. There is no money for inefficiency, weak ideas, or maintaining ineffective systems. But there are strategies such as the ones that I have mentioned today, that if receiving greater focus and resources, would lead to improved and more equitable outcomes. In Bethlehem we are determined to end race, ethnicity, and economic standing as reliable predictors of students' school success. That is not a dream—it's a goal. A goal that equitable, fair funding can and should support.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my remarks with you this morning.