

**Keystone
State
Education
Coalition**

The Keystone State Education Coalition was originally established in 2006 as the Southeastern Pennsylvania School Districts' Education Coalition (SPSDEC). It is a growing grass roots, non-partisan public education advocacy group comprised of several more than 2500 locally elected, volunteer school board members (no salaries, no benefits, no pensions) and administrators from more than 300 Pennsylvania school districts in Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Berks, Bucks, Butler, Centre, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Indiana, Lancaster, Lawrence, Lehigh, Mercer, Montgomery, Susquehanna, Tioga and Washington Counties.

Visit us online at: KeystoneStateEducationCoalition.org

Testimony of Mark B Miller.

School Director, Centennial School District,

Co-Chair, Keystone State Education Coalition

1st Vice President, Pennsylvania School Boards Association

Chair, PSBA Legislative Platform Committee

Delegate, National School Boards Association Federal Relations Network

Member, NSBA – Teacher/Principal Effectiveness Committee

Director – Network for Public Education

before

The Special Education Funding Commission

Meeting at Alvernia College

Reading, PA

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HB 2 / Act 3 – Special Education Funding Commission Collection of Information

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Keystone State Education Coalition Co-Chairs:

Lawrence A. Feinberg, School District of Haverford Township, Delaware County

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Lynn Foltz, Wilmington Area School District, Lawrence County

Mark B. Miller, Centennial School District, Bucks County

Roberta Marcus, Parkland School District, Lehigh County

Good Morning Committee Members and Guests. I am Mark B. Miller, an elected School Director with Centennial School District in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. I am also Co-Chair of Keystone State Education Coalition, a non-partisan education advocacy group with 2,500 members from more than 300 School Districts across the Commonwealth. Some other qualifications I hold to speak to the business of this commission are my position as 1st Vice President of Pennsylvania School Boards Association where I am chair the Legislative Platform Committee and through my service with public education historian and advocate, Diane Ravitch, on the board of directors to the Network for Public Education.

My testimony today is intended to provide information as called for under Act 3 with regard to the challenges faced by individual school districts in meeting the expenses unfairly paid to charter and cyber charter schools for special education services. I am before you today, specifically as an elected school director to Centennial School District in Bucks County, PA.

It is fitting I do so, as this very commission was signed into existence by Governor Corbett in a ceremony held at the William Tennent High School in Centennial School District, where Representative Bernie O'Neill served our community as special education teacher.



Knowing this commission was formed after several attempts spreading over seven years and representing the work of so many people like Representative O'Neill, Senator Pat Brown and Representative Mike Sturla, before HB2 passed without opposition to become Act 3, we must remain cognizant the work of this commission is likely to stand for many years to come.

I am confident it is your intent to assure there is a facility to monitor and adjust the plan you will recommend to Governor Corbett such that adjustments are made as necessary over the life of your work. I will not protract my remarks to repeat things I have heard others tell you over the previous sessions. My colleague, Mr Romberger has

already shared the broad strokes. I intend to present actual data from my own school district which is attached hereto.

If I may draw your attention to the chart, you will note this data covers the actual cost to Centennial School District over a period of five (5) years, beginning in 2009-10 school year and for three subsequent years, ending with the projected costs for the current 2013-14 school year. Our CFO has a fairly good track record for accuracy and can assure you these numbers are quite reliable.

For the period 2009-11, our district was helped by additional funding from the Federal Stimulus. On the other hand, you will see a continual decline of funding from the Commonwealth from a high in 2009-10 of \$3,189,242 to the current expectation of \$2,857,526 while our case load continues to rise. This represents a drop in state funding (irrespective of Federal funds) in excess of ten (10%) percent over the past five years.

As of December 2012, we carried 1090 (18.8%) special education students on our books. The subtle rise each year comes from both greater identification of need and families who move into our district in expectation of receiving an high level of care and support in Centennial School District.

The current average cost for a student who receives special education services in Centennial School District is \$13,274.42. This

amount is the incremental cost of providing special education services and nothing more. Our cost of \$13,987,992 in 2009-10 resulted in deficit of \$8,709,845. In the current 2013-14 school year, we anticipate a cost of \$17,336,699 and a \$13,370,615.

Accordingly, our annual expense over the last five years rose \$3,348,707 or 24% while our total funding fell by 30%. Both of these trends are going in the wrong direction for Centennial School District as it strives to deliver a free and appropriate public education in a least restrictive environment.

Included in this array is one single case approaching an annual cost for out of district placement which approaches \$90,000. A case not included in these calculations is one case where the family sought to manage their child's care and accepted a one-time payment from the district for a potential lifetime cost of \$1,000,000.

We could spend more time to review this data. However, I think this is an appropriate time to remind you of another elephant in the room from the herd of pachyderms attacking my district. During the same period of time, our district paid \$2,465,573 into PSERS for 2009-10 rising to \$6,329,216 for 2012-13. Over the next five years, we will contribute \$65,827,409 to PSERS as opposed to \$18,261,059 which another financial burden trending in the wrong direction.

In other rooms this week, we hear the fight for an fair funding formula for public education, property tax relief (HB76 clones), other charter school reforms (HB 618) on top of a \$500,000,000 reduction in funding for public education in each of the last two years. Even the wealthiest of communities are struggling with the cost of providing public education and special education to the level needed in their school district.

Likewise, as many communities are aging due to extended life expectancy, it is not uncommon for suburban districts in Bucks and Montgomery Counties to find 80% of taxpaying households do not have children enrolled in public education. Many of these households are on fixed incomes. We are reminded of this every day by one group or another.

Public Education is the ONLY service provided for in the constitution of this great Commonwealth. Yet, 46 states spend a greater share of their annual budget on public education. There are 47 states with a funding formula for public education. The work of this commission is a great first step in the right direction.

Thank you for your kind attention.