

Basic Education Funding Commission

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Testimony

Dr. Thomas W. Ralston

Superintendent

Avonworth School District

Good morning members of the Commission. I am pleased to have the opportunity to offer testimony on the topic of Basic Education Funding. Specifically, I am here to discuss the impact Pennsylvania's school funding formula has had on the Avonworth School District.

The Avonworth School District is located approximately 10 miles north of the city of Pittsburgh in the northern suburban area. Demographically, Avonworth serves a population of 1,570 of students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Because of the quality educational program and close location of the School District community to both I-79 and I-279, Avonworth has become an attractive location for families to choose as their home. In 2013, Avonworth School District was identified as one of the fastest growing school districts in Allegheny County. From 2008 to present, the district student enrollment has increased from 1,403 students to 1,570 students. Enrollment is expected to continue to rise as two additional residential developments are in the process of completion over the next two years with nearly 150 new homes.

However, from 2008 to present, the Avonworth School District's Basic Education Funding has remained relatively flat, actually decreasing slightly. Correspondingly, due to our increasing enrollment, total expenditures have risen, as has our percentage of expenditures covered by local effort. During this same time period, per student funding has dropped nearly \$200.00, from \$1,747.59 to \$1,554.63. As you may know, Act 1 places constraints on the amount of local revenue that can be generated through

taxes. In order to meet the fiscal demands due to continued growth, the Avonworth Board of School Directors have raised taxes seven out of the last nine years. The last three years, taxes were raised to the maximum level permitted under Act 1. So, Avonworth is truly placed in a perfect storm: more students, flat funding from the Commonwealth, more services needed, limited ability to generate local dollars.

While the Avonworth community has seen significant residential growth resulting in an increase in student population, there has also been an increase in the needs for supports and services for these students. To alleviate overcrowding at the Elementary School, the School District engaged in a construction project to accommodate the rising enrollment. This fall, the District completed construction of the Avonworth Primary Center which houses students in kindergarten through second grade. This has increased the debt service for the School District. Likewise, in order to serve the influx of students, professional staff has increased from 89 in 2005 to 121 in 2014. This increase in staffing to serve children is an absolute necessity. Increasing enrollment also means more support staff, bus routes, materials, and technology.

In addition, mandates from the Pennsylvania Department of Education have also driven additional expenditures for staffing to meet these expectations. For example, the Pennsylvania Information Management System otherwise known as PIMS, has increased District costs by over \$60,000 annually. This unfunded mandate has taken resources out of classrooms for the purpose of data collection for accountability measures such as the School Performance Profile. \$60,000 is roughly the cost of a teacher, or two paraprofessionals. Is the School Performance Profile more important than the learning needs of children?

Pennsylvania needs a school funding system that makes sense, is equitable, stable, and covers the cost of the mandates that the district has little or no control, such as PIMS and PSERS. More than

ever before the Commonwealth needs a school funding formula that meets these criteria. It is an imperative that those in a position of authority act now to ensure the future for Pennsylvania's children.

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to share my insights as a professional educator.

With kindest regards,

Thomas W. Ralston, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Avonworth School District