

Dear superintendents,

Yesterday, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a 2009-10 budget proposal that threatens to undermine the progress we have made in public education over the past six years by cutting Governor Rendell's proposed budget for school districts by more than \$1 billion. I am writing to make certain you have the facts about this proposal, which is expected to come before the full Senate within the next couple days.

Here is what Senate Bill 850 does:

- Eliminates the \$418 million basic education funding increase for the second year of Pennsylvania's school funding formula proposed by Governor Rendell using federal stimulus funds;
- Eliminates the \$317 million in federal stimulus State Fiscal Stabilization Fund grants intended to avoid property tax hikes and staff cuts and invest in proven academic programs;
- Takes \$730 million in state funding out of the basic education subsidy – using federal stimulus funds to level-fund school districts this year but creating a \$730 million hole when federal stimulus funds expire in two years.

In short, SB 850 would spend nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars in stimulus funds to keep basic education funding stagnant in the coming fiscal year. The bill takes \$730 million in stimulus funds, which Congress and the President intended to be used to avoid tax increases and teacher layoffs and spur increases in student achievement, to fund programs elsewhere in the state budget under SB 850. This is not a good plan for moving Pennsylvania forward.

And in a year in which many school districts are seeing substantial declines in local revenue, flat funding of the state basic education subsidy means local tax increases will be necessary in many hard pressed communities.

What's more, SB 850 completely eliminates funding in 2009-10 for several of our most innovative learning initiatives, including "Science: It's Elementary," "Classrooms for the Future" and "Dual Enrollment." SB 850 also makes dramatic cuts in high school reform funding, charter school reimbursement, teacher professional development, career and technical education, and alternative education funding.

Clearly, we are in difficult economic times and tough choices must be made to balance the state's budget, as Governor Rendell has done in his budget proposal. That said, I hope you agree that educational investments are essential to helping the commonwealth recover from this recession and endure future ones.

I am writing to urge you and your colleagues to make your voices heard now and in the coming weeks to ensure our collective achievements in funding a world-class education system are not abandoned. Please call your local lawmakers and stress the

importance of keeping Pennsylvania's public school funding on track and using federal stimulus funds responsibly.

Sincerely,

Jerry

Gerald L. Zahorchak
Secretary of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126
717.783.9780