

Dear Governor Corbett, Senator Eichelberger and Representative Fleck,

The cuts proposed by both the Governor and the legislature to education funding in our state are disastrous. For 2011-12, our district is faced with a \$2.7 million shortfall, and we are faced with the specter of closing *half* of our elementary schools, cutting our music, art and sports programs, along with the possibility of losing *half* of our foreign language instruction and large parts of our support for gifted students, just to name some of the cuts. With this lower level of funding moving forward, next year we will be faced with more program cuts, and the year after, and so on. Funding for education must be restored, supported by appropriate statewide tax revenue.

Our district is being punished for having been responsible. Over the past several years, our district has already eliminated numerous positions, including one third of our elementary music program through attrition, and our district has held property tax increases to far below the rate of inflation for the last decade. Now we are faced with a huge cut to the state basic education subsidy, because the Governor and legislature refuse to properly restore money that was supplanted by federal stimulus funds in the past two years. This cut comes just as our district, like others in the state, faces a large increase in mandated contributions for pensions, a problem that was largely created by the state legislature's mishandling of the pension system. We also face large increases in health insurance costs in the immediate future.

These state funding cuts disproportionately affect smaller rural districts like ours, because we receive a greater proportion of our funding from the state than do larger, more affluent districts, and our communities are already strapped by current property tax levels. Additionally, under legislation currently proposed that would do away with Act 1 exemptions, we may not be able to raise a significant amount of local tax to make up for more than a small percentage of the cuts, let alone for the increase in retirement contributions. While some affluent suburban districts have budgets that reflect an overall expenditure of about \$29,000 per student, our district strains to provide about \$13,000 per student. How is this fair?

This problem could be answered by an increase in the state basic education subsidy, funded in part by a severance tax on natural gas production (something which *all* other major gas producing states *except* Pennsylvania do), and by dedicating a larger share of funds derived from the state's income tax revenue. Given time, this change in funding could provide *real* local property tax relief. Education is mandated by state law, yet it is funded in large part with local property tax. All Pennsylvanians benefit from the education that is provided by our local schools, yet our district will pay tens of thousands of dollars to educate someone who may end up working in and contributing to the economy in another area in Pennsylvania. Why should the bulk of those costs be borne by local taxpayers, many who are on fixed incomes?

This is personal. Our schools and the future of our community are at stake. The state's basic education subsidy *must* be increased so that it returns to where it would have been *with the amount that was supplanted by federal funds included*, plus an increment for inflation. We cannot continue to support political figures who gut our schools while refusing to tax industries which are removing resources from our state, industries that are using our highways and water treatment systems and using the students produced by our schools. Our schools are our future. Politicians who destroy our schools are not.

Sincerely,