

For Immediate Release
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New voices join education funding debate in Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pa. (June 20, 2008) -- A set of voices that often go unheard in politics have joined education advocates in calling upon the General Assembly to enact Pennsylvania's first school funding formula in nearly two decades. Those voices belong to public school students from across the Commonwealth.

During the past year, Good Schools Pennsylvania and Education Law Center asked students through the Commonwealth to share their hopes and goals and comment on how under-funding of public schools affects their education and their future.

Their stories are told through photography, through video, and are now crafted into a 30-second public service announcement set to air next week in several Pennsylvania media markets.

The video can be viewed here -- <http://youtube.com/watch?v=CoUBXBztpK8>.

"Every student deserves to go to a high quality school because we are the future," said Julie Nicotra, a 10th grade student at Sto-Rox School District, who participated in the student project. "We deserve to come to school and not have to worry about the conditions we learn in. Our ceilings are falling in and in some classrooms there are too many students. I think every school should have the same funding. I hope you will try to help us make a difference."

In the video, students issue a challenge to the General Assembly to improve their schools and their future by implementing a new education funding formula. "I am the youth of tomorrow, but can you help me today?" said Amanda Stanford, a high school student from Philadelphia. "I count. Can I count on you?"

"The opinions of students are not often considered in policy debates," said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania. "However, it is evident that these students care deeply about the quality of education they receive, and are acutely aware that -- because of inadequate resources -- they do not have the same opportunity to achieve their goals for college and careers. This affects us all."

At stake in the current 2008-09 state budget negotiations is a commitment to a new school formula - Pennsylvania's first since 1991 - that would distribute state funding for public education on an ongoing "costing-out" process rather than the political whims and battles each year in the Capitol. The proposal includes a six-year plan to ramp up state funding to schools by \$2.6 billion, thereby relieving the relentless pressure on local property taxes.

"The proposal for a new school funding formula presents an historic opportunity for school districts and students across Pennsylvania," said Baruch Kintisch, staff attorney for the Education Law Center, an organization that advocates on behalf of students living in poverty, with disabilities, or who are learning English. "For the first time in two decades, a new school funding formula would ensure that students and schools have the appropriate level of resources they need to provide a high quality education in every school and in every community around the state."

"This is the best opportunity in a generation to adequately fund public education in Pennsylvania," concluded Risch. "As the General Assembly arrives at the final weeks of budget negotiations, we think these student voices serve as a reminder that the decisions our legislators

make will have an impact far beyond this fiscal year. Indeed, a new school funding system would create change and possibility for an entire generation of students. Everyone is affected as our state's economy and community well-being depend on these reforms."

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