



# Education Update

From the Senate Education Committee

APRIL 10, 2006

## Report Shows Decline in Mandate Waiver Requests

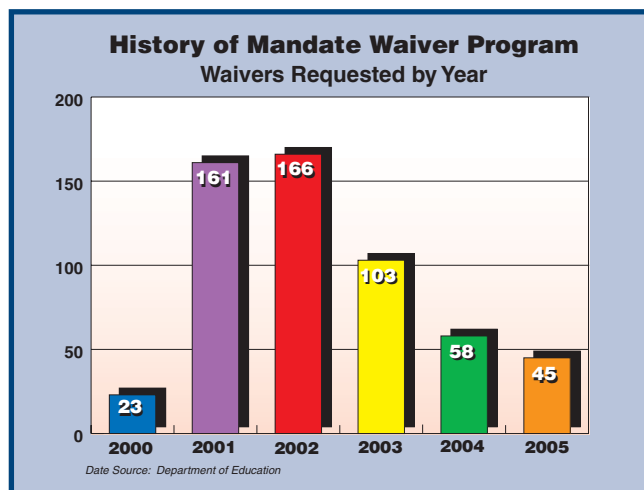
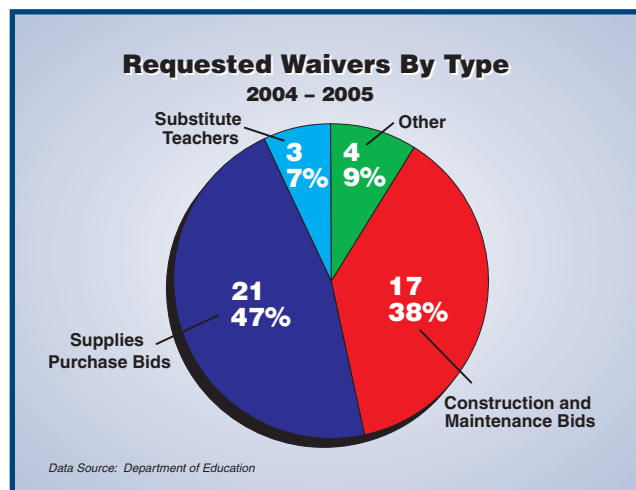
A report issued by the Department of Education indicates that school district requests through the mandate waiver program declined for the third consecutive year in FY 2004-2005.

In FY 2004-2005, there were 45 applications for waivers from laws governing the purchase of supplies, maintenance and construction requirements, alternative education programs

and substitute teachers. Interest in the program peaked in 2002, when 166 waiver requests were submitted.

According to the Department's report, 85% of the waiver requests in FY 2004-2005 dealt with waivers from purchasing, construction and maintenance requirements. The majority of the waiver requests were approved, with four still pending.

Under the mandate waiver program approved by the General Assembly in 2000, school districts, intermediate units and area vocational technical schools may submit waiver requests to the Department and must summarize the benefits of the waiver, indicate the need for the waiver and provide accompanying data on the process.



## Education Chairs Oppose Department's Chapter 339 Voc-Ag Proposal

Senator Rhoades and Senator Raphael Musto, minority chairman of the Senate Education Committee, have joined to oppose a standard proposed by the Department of Education that would cut state funding to vocational agricultural programs that provide less than 360 hours of instruction.

Senator Rhoades and Senator

Musto sent a joint letter to Education Secretary Gerald Zahorchak opposing the proposed change to 22 PA Code, Chapter 339.

The senators argued that limiting state funding to programs that provide 360 hours or more of instruction would effectively eliminate the vast majority of the programs that are offered in the

regular high school setting.

A number of other members of the Senate and House of Representatives have registered the same concerns.

The proposed standard has been the subject of public comment through the regulatory review process. It has not been promulgated in final form.

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**Senator James J. Rhoades**  
*Chairman*

David L. Broderic  
*Executive Director*

## Education Empowerment Report: Additional School District Moves Off List

According to the Department of Education's annual Education Empowerment Report, only six of the eleven school districts designated as education empowerment districts in 2000 remain on the education empowerment list.

At the conclusion of the 2004-2005 school year, the Wilkinsburg School

District was removed from the list because of improvements in academic performance.

To qualify as an education empowerment district, sixty percent or more of a school district's students must score in the below basic quartile of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exam. School dis-

tricts on the education empowerment list receive assistance from state advisors and funding through the school improvement grant program

As part of the transition to the federal No Child Left Behind Act, no additional school districts will be added to the empowerment class.

### School Districts on Education Empowerment List

2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Aliquippa	Aliquippa	Aliquippa	Aliquippa	Aliquippa
Allentown	Allentown	Allentown	Chester-Upland	Chester-Upland
Chester-Upland	Chester-Upland	Chester-Upland	Duquesne City	Duquesne City
Clairton City	Clairton City	Duquesne City	Harrisburg City	Harrisburg City
Duquesne City	Duquesne City	Harrisburg City	Philadelphia	Philadelphia
Harrisburg City	Harrisburg City	Philadelphia	Reading City	Reading City
Lancaster City	Lancaster City	Reading City	Wilkinsburg	
Philadelphia	Philadelphia	Wilkinsburg		
Steelton-Highspire	Steelton-Highspire	York City		
Sto-Rox	Sto-Rox			
Wilkinsburg	Wilkinsburg			
York City	York City			

Data Source: Department of Education

### Act 72 Index Controls School District Tax Rate Increases

The Homeowner Tax Relief Act, Act 72 of 2004, limits school district tax increases to a specific percentage, called the index.

The index is determined annually for each school district by averaging the percentage increase in the Statewide Average Weekly Wage (SAWW)

and Federal employment cost index for elementary and secondary educa-

tion (ECI) and adjusting it for school districts with MV/PI aid ratios over 0.4000.

Act 72 Index Controls	
FORMULA ELEMENT	FY 2006-2007
Percentage Change in SAWW	4.2%
Percentage Change in ECI	3.5%
Base Index	3.9%
Range of Adjusted Index	3.9% to 6.3%

For FY 2006-2007, the base index, which is the average of the SAWW and the ECI, is 3.9%. For individual school districts that receive the aid ratio adjustment, the highest index is 6.3%

For more information or detailed analyses of these topics, contact the Senate Education Committee staff at 787-2637.