



Education Update

From the Senate Education Committee

APRIL 9, 2007

Committee Hearing: Federal NCLB Funding Remains Flat

During a Senate Education Committee hearing, members pointed out that federal funding for programs related to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has remained flat for several fiscal years, with no significant increases likely in FY 2008.

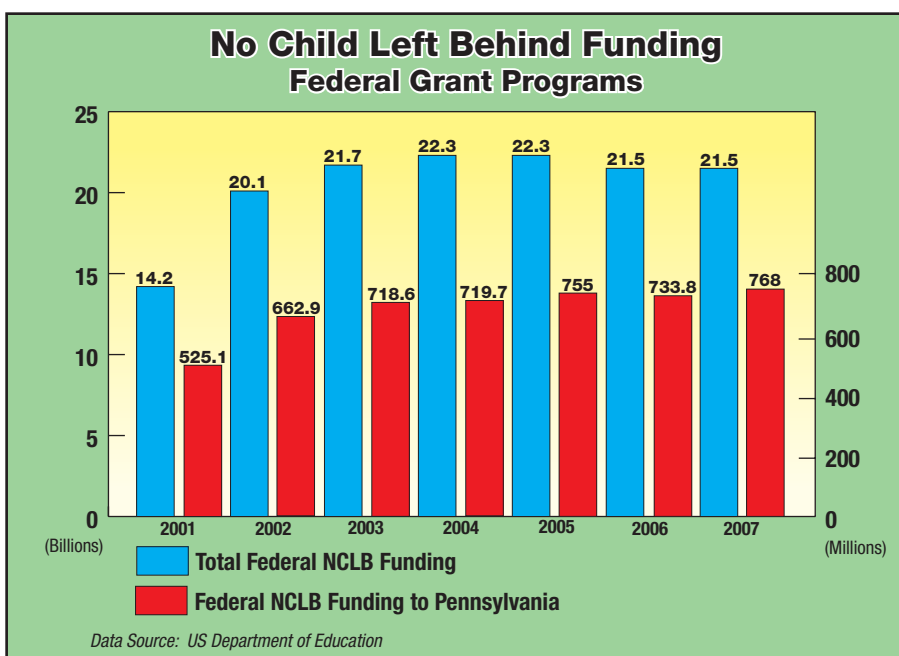
Members indicated that federal funding for NCLB programs increased only marginally between FY 2006 and FY 2007, holding steady at \$21.5 billion. Pennsylvania will receive approximately \$768 million in FY 2007, compared with \$733 million in FY 2006.

Federal funding increased significantly in FY 2002, the year after NCLB was approved by the Congress, but has remained flat since then.

To assist Pennsylvania school districts in meeting the NCLB goals, the General Assembly created the accountability block grant program and the education assistance tutoring

program in 2003. Since FY 2002-2003, the General Assembly has approved a total of \$845 million for both programs.

NCLB requires that each student be considered "proficient" by 2014. The law is currently up for reauthorization in the Congress.



Senate Approves Anti-Bullying Legislation

On March 12, the Senate approved legislation aimed at preventing incidents of bullying in Pennsylvania's public schools by directing school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies by June 30, 2007.

Senate Bill 71, which the Senate Education Committee reported on February 6, would require each school district to adopt an anti-bullying policy. The policy would include disciplinary

measures for students who participate in bullying and may include intervention and prevention programs. The policy would be provided to parents annually as part of each school district's code of student conduct.

In addition, Secretary of Education Gerald Zahorchak has agreed to amend the definition of "bullying" in the Department's annual school safety report so that it includes "cyber bully-

ing." As a result, school district anti-bullying policies would include cyber bullying and school districts would be required to annually report incidents of cyber bullying to the Department.

According to the Department's school safety report, 819 incidents of bullying occurred on school grounds during the 2004-2005 school year.

The Senate passed Senate Bill 71 by a vote of 42 to 6. It is now in the House Judiciary Committee, awaiting action.

Senate Education Committee

Phone: 787-2637

FAX: 783-9149

senateeducationcommittee@pasen.gov

Senator James J. Rhoades
Chairman

David L. Broderic
Executive Director

School Lunch and Breakfast Bill Advances Without Stricter Nutrition Guidelines

The Senate Education Committee approved legislation to increase state reimbursements for school lunch and breakfast programs, without requiring school districts to adhere to nutritional guidelines more stringent than what federal regulation requires.

State reimbursements for school lunch and breakfast programs have not been increased since FY 2001-2002.

Senate Bill 159, which Senator Rhoades introduced, would increase school lunch and breakfast reimbursements by approximately \$4.5 million. In FY 2006-2007, Pennsylvania schools will

On the Governor's School Lunch and Breakfast Proposal:
"...the cost of meeting the guidelines far outpaces the proposed increase."

– PASBO and SNAP

receive \$28,665,000 in state funds for the school lunch and school breakfast program and \$369,201,000 in federal funding for the program.

Governor Edward Rendell has proposed to increase state funding for school lunch and breakfast reimburse-

ments by \$6.5 million, but only to school districts that adopt nutritional guidelines approved by the state Department of Education.

In a letter to committee members, representatives of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) and School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania (SNAP) called the nutritional guidelines the Governor proposed "inflexible and overly restrictive" and indicated that "the cost of meeting the guidelines far outpaces the proposed increase" that the Governor has requested.

Department Approves Act 1 Exceptions For 40% of School Districts

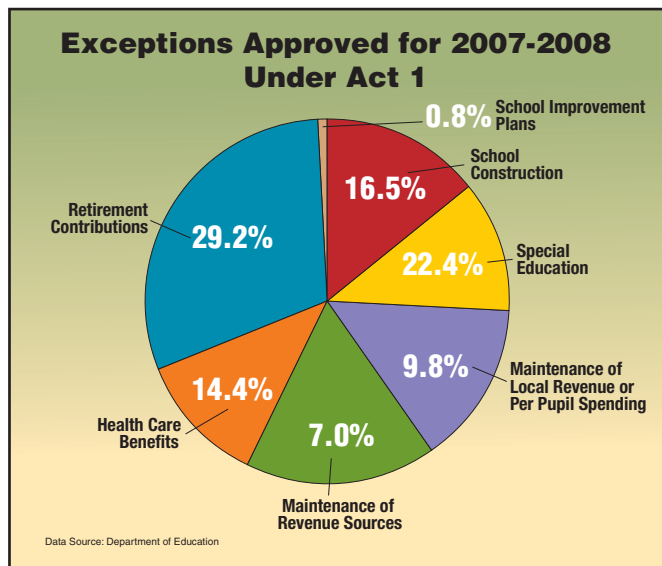
A report released by the Department of Education indicates that 40% of Pennsylvania school districts received approval for back-end referendum exceptions that will allow them to increase their property tax rates above the Act 1 index.

According to the report, the Department approved a total of 644

back-end referendum exceptions for 210 school districts. Under Act 1, the Taxpayer Relief Act, school districts may apply for one or more of ten exceptions. If an exception is granted, the Department computes a dollar value for that exception, which is then translated into the equivalent increase in the school district's property tax rate.

This allows a school district to increase its property tax rate above the index without seeking approval from the voters through a back-end referendum.

Sixty-eight percent of the exceptions the Department approved were in the categories of school construction indebtedness, special education expenditures and retirement contributions.



Senate Education Committee Activities

Tuesday, April 17

Room 8E-A, Capitol East Wing
 10:30 a.m.
 Committee Meeting

Wednesday, April 18

Hearing Room 1, North Office Building
 9:00 a.m.
 Public Hearing
 Classrooms for the Future Program

Tuesday, April 24

Senate Majority Caucus Room
 9:00 a.m.
 Public Hearing
 No Child Left Behind Reauthorization

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