



PARSS Legislative Update

January 12, 2024

Basic Ed Funding Commission Fails to Reach Bi-Partisan Agreement?

After seven months of efforts, the Basic Ed Funding Commission could not find bi-partisan agreement for a new school funding plan. The Commission met yesterday for its final meeting.

Two plans were considered at the meeting, the first plan vote resulted in a deadlock and the second was adopted on an 8-7 vote with only Democrats on the Commission voting in favor.

What does the vote mean for schools? Unfortunately, the lack of bi-partisan agreement on a plan will make any substantive changes to school funding in the next state budget more difficult but perhaps not impossible to attain. Here are some major recommendations of the approved plan:

The BEF Formula—Both testifiers and Commission members believe the current basic education funding formula is a quality formula that needs minor adjustments to make it more predictable.

BEF Funding Level—We note that the prior four education Commissions did not recommend specific funding amounts as part of their reports to the General Assembly, and we recommend following that precedent here.

Adequacy—Unfortunately, the Commission could not reach a consensus on a model for measuring adequacy to recommend to the General Assembly given these circumstances. Therefore, it is up to the General Assembly to determine the appropriate adequacy model.

School Choice—As the General Assembly works toward improving low performing schools, school choice should be available to students and their families, who lack resources, with immediate options to attend a high performing school.

School Facilities—Require the Department of Education to collect school building conditions data by way of facility assessments conducted by school districts. Data collection should be done every five to ten years on a standardized form provided by the Department for uniformity.

District Consolidation—If outright consolidation seems cost-prohibitive or politically untenable, the testimony suggests, and we agree, less disruptive alternatives like sharing individual programs or services may be more viable places to start. For example, collaborating on specialized or advanced courses between districts would maximize student opportunity and achieve some economies of scale without requiring full administrative or operational mergers.

Poverty Data—Considering the problems with both the ACS data and the economically disadvantaged data, the Commission believes that the Pennsylvania Department of Education should develop a new poverty metric to replace ACS poverty data and provide greater confidence in the formula. The report also calls for consideration of a three-year calculation of the concentrated poverty metric.

To read the entire BEFC report [use this link](#). You can also [use this link](#) to read the report that was not approved by the Commission