

## Pennsylvania School District Consolidation

- Governor Rendell proposes to create a legislative commission to study how best to right-size Pennsylvania's local school districts. His goal is to have no more than 100 school districts.
- Full-scale school consolidation provides a very effective way to relieve the local property tax burden all across Pennsylvania. There is no need to maintain 500 separate schools districts across the state – each with its own staggering, and growing, administrative costs.
- Reducing the number of school districts would not necessitate the closure of individual schools, but could instead improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public education through other means.
- Only 10 states in the nation have more school districts than Pennsylvania, while many of the highest-achieving states are organized into far fewer school districts in order to achieve greater efficiencies and improve the delivery of quality educational services.
- More than 40 percent of Pennsylvania's school districts currently educate fewer than 2,000 students and over 80 percent of school districts educate fewer than 5,000 students, requiring significant bureaucracy while raising questions about the diversity of courses offered to students.
- Consolidation is not a new idea in Pennsylvania: in 1955, there were 2,700 separate school districts before the General Assembly authorized consolidations statewide. Within two years the number of separate districts fell to 1,900. By 1962, the number of separate school districts fell to 600, and as of July there will be 500 school districts statewide.
- The proposed commission would have 12 voting members appointed by the General Assembly:
  - Three members of the Senate of Pennsylvania appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate;
  - Three members of the Senate of Pennsylvania appointed by the minority leader of the Senate;
  - Three members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the House; and
  - Three members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives appointed by the minority leader of the House.
- It would also have two non-voting members who serve ex-officio:
  - The Secretary of Education; and
  - The chairman of the State Board of Education.
- The proposed commission would have one year to develop a plan for the reorganization of school districts. It would be responsible for determining the optimal enrollment size, new statewide boundaries, and an implementation plan.
- To ensure progress is made, the Governor proposes that the commission adopt up to two merger plans. After a period of public comment, the General Assembly would be required to give an "up or down" vote to each commission consolidation plan within six months.
- If the General Assembly rejects both plans, the law would vest authority for consolidating school districts with the State Board of Education.