

**Testimony of
Jim Buckheit
Executive Director
State Board of Education
Before the
Senate Majority Policy Committee
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Avon Grove Intermediate School**

Good afternoon Senator Corman and distinguished members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. My name is Jim Buckheit. I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the State Board of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to share information about Pennsylvania's first-ever, statewide education costing out study.

The Board believes this study will provide important information the General Assembly and Governor to address both the adequacy and equity of school funding. I have been asked to brief you on the progress of the study, to discuss some of its elements and plans for the release the study.

As states – including Pennsylvania – have enacted standards-based reforms of their education systems over the past decade or more, and as the federal No Child Left Behind Act has increased the stakes for helping all children attain the standards, more and more states have begun to ask what it will cost to reach the goal of 100 percent proficiency. Pennsylvania is now one of about 35 states that have undertaken or are currently conducting costing-out studies.

Legislation enacted by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor last July (Act 114 of 2006) required the State Board to contract with an expert firm to conduct Pennsylvania's study. In consultation with legislative leaders, the Board developed a request for proposals last summer, reviewed proposals last fall, and selected the firm of Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA) of Denver, Colorado. A contract was signed in December, and APA has been hard at work since the first of the year.

The study addresses two issues – equity and adequacy. The former grows out of concerns among legislators about the growing gap between high- and low-spending districts and the implications for the quality of education received by students in our lowest spending districts. The latter grows out of a desire among legislators to understand what it costs for all of our students – no matter where they live – to attain state standards.

The State Board has two overriding interests in the study it has been tasked to oversee. The first is independence – to shield the consultants from potential political interference. The second is transparency – to assure that interested parties are kept apprised of the study as it progresses. We are doing that through the involvement of educators and other citizens in some elements of the study itself through posting reports

and updates on the Board's website, providing updates at public meetings of the Board, briefings to legislative staff and through numerous presentations to interested groups.

In May APA issued its interim report, as required by Act 114, and the report was presented at the State Board meeting May 16. I have brought copies for you. You should know that the report summarizes the work done to date and is essentially procedural in nature.

What has been accomplished so far?

1. APA has collected and analyzed voluminous data on student demographics, schools and districts, finances, performance measures, school personnel and their salaries and fringe benefits, and student transportation.
2. After reviewing the language of Act 114 and consulting with the Board, APA developed a standard to be costed-out and reviewed this with a group of statewide stakeholders in January. That standard in short is that all students are proficient in the 12 academic standards areas in Chapter 4 of State Board regulations as measured by local districts and that all students are proficient on the PSSA in those areas assessed by the state by 2014. The study will answer the question: What will it cost in each district, given that district's demographic and economic conditions, for all students to meet this standard?
3. APA contracted with several subcontractors to undertake some of the analyses, provided data to them, and managed their initial progress.
4. APA identified and completed its analysis of school districts that meet criteria to be deemed "successful" and analyzed the costs of educational services in those districts.
5. It has conducted ten professional judgment panels composed of educators, business officials and others charged with designing hypothetical educational programs designed to allow all students to meet the standard.
6. Two members of the APA team conducted stakeholder sessions with school board members, parents, and business representatives in six areas of the state (the other three regions having been the sites of the professional judgment panels).
7. In conjunction with the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) at the University of Oregon, APA conducted an evidence-based web simulation that involved more than 100 of Pennsylvania's educators.
8. A cost function analysis of Pennsylvania's schools was undertaken by New York University and a transportation cost model was performed by Penn State University.

The work of APA is being overseen, but not meddled in, by a special State Board Committee, chaired by Dr. James Barker of Erie, Larry Wittig, Mollie O'Connell Phillips and Karl Girton. It is staffed from the Board's side by Dr. Robert Feir, former executive director of the State Board and myself.

Based upon our oversight of APA's work, we are confident that APA will provide a report that will be instrumental in helping the General Assembly and the Governor understand the resources the state must provide if each child in Pennsylvania is to have the kind of education that allows him or her to meet the state's academic standards.

APA will provide a single statewide per student dollar amount that it estimates is needed to address adequacy. APA will also include adjustment factors that reflect additional costs for support students with disabilities, English language learners, students from economically disadvantaged families and students who are gifted. In addition, APA will provide a number for each of the Commonwealth's 501 school districts based on each district's demographics, student enrollment and sparsity or density of population.

APA believes strongly that releasing findings piecemeal when Act 114 requires a single conclusion drawn from a variety of study methods would undermine both the integrity of the study's sophisticated approach and the ultimate findings themselves. The State Board supports this position, so findings will not be reported until November 14, when the final report is formally presented to the State Board. Briefings will be held for the leadership of the Senate, House of Representatives and the Governor. In addition, following these activities the Board will conduct six regional public briefings which are scheduled on November 27-28 and December 5-6. The public briefings are designed to provide an opportunity for educators and taxpayers to learn first hand the results of the study.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the costing out study with you.

I would be happy to address any questions you might have.