

Costing-Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Education Goals for Students with Disabilities

Special Education Solutions Based on the 2007 Costing-Out Study

→ Full report available at <http://reformspecialfunding.org/>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

School districts have a duty to provide and children with disabilities have a right to receive the basic supports and services needed to succeed in school. The Commonwealth benefits when these students receive an education preparing them for meaningful employment, higher education, and self-sufficiency. Strategic changes in the funding system for Special Education are needed to fulfill Pennsylvania's commitment to these issues. Most school districts currently do not have the resources needed to provide a quality education to children with disabilities.

The funding system for Special Education can be improved to provide adequate resources using a needs-based formula and with strengthened accountability. These reforms would produce significant gains, allowing all schools to provide essential Special Education supports and services and giving children a chance for a productive life.

The 2007 Costing-out Study commissioned by the General Assembly found that most districts have large gaps in funding, resulting in a shortfall of resources needed for students to meet state standards. Based on the Study, the state acted in 2008 to form a new funding system for Basic Education aimed at providing adequate resources. The new Basic Education funding system takes into consideration the higher costs associated with educating students in poverty, English language learners, and other district-based factors.

The funding system for students with disabilities was not addressed by the 2008 reforms, although the Costing-out Study recommended that Special Education should be funded based on student and district needs. The new report addressing these issues was prepared by the same national consultants who researched the 2007 Study – Augenblick, Palaich and Associates. The new report identifies and evaluates Special Education solutions based on the 2007 Study and discusses why it is important for the state to finish the funding reforms begun last year.

Key findings of the 2009 Special Education Report include:

- Providing a basic, quality education for students eligible for special education requires, on average, more than twice the cost of teaching students without special needs.
- 391 school districts have inadequate funding for special education, averaging an annual shortfall of nearly \$1 million per district.
- Statewide, the total gap in annual funding for special education is \$380 million. The average per pupil shortfall is \$1,947, based on a total of 194,862 students in districts with a funding gap.
- Raising special education resources to an adequate level for all students would greatly increase the ability of school districts to meet the basic needs of students with disabilities.
- Fundamental needs that often go under-served include: (i) adequate staffing, specialized personnel, and professional development; (ii) assistive technology devices/services; (iii) student support programs/services.
- Funding reforms will benefit families and communities by strengthening the education of all students, increasing instructional effectiveness, improving student performance, and lowering long-run societal costs.

