

House Education

04/18/2024 01:30 PM

HB24-1448 New Public School Finance Formula

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
Mary Rodino Against Aspen School District	Aspen School District (ASD) opposes this legislation. The District stands to lose \$5 million after the Hold Harmless period ends. ASD has had particular financial difficulty post COVID pandemic. Property values went up 60% and staff cannot afford housing or the cost of living within the County. We are pressured to pay the highest salaries in the state because we have one of the highest cost of living rates in the state. We cannot afford high wages. We have had \$5 million in deficits in the last three years and are now down to a \$2 million (or 6% of operating expenses) fund balance. We are facing a credit downgrade if we don't build up reserves. We have a plan, but losing \$5 million would be devastating. We support other districts getting more funding, but not if we lose 16% of ours.
Charo Egan Against themselves	Good afternoon. I have been a teacher in a Douglas County school for ten years, and all three of my adult children attended Douglas County schools. Douglas County already runs lean, operating at a lower per pupil revenue than the state average. HB 24-1448 would limit funding to a .1% increase annually, making it incredibly difficult to increase salaries at a reasonable rate each year, potentially exacerbating a looming teacher shortage. While the state has injected considerable funds into underperforming districts, the correlation between increased funding and improved performance remains tenuous. Pumping more money into underperforming districts does not guarantee improvement in performance, yet taking money away from districts and making it difficult for them to retain teachers and pay operating expenses will undoubtedly have detrimental effects. This bill effectively penalizes well-performing districts, raising questions about its ultimate impact. Studies have shown that schools account for only one-third of student achievement. "The remaining two-thirds are attributable to non-school factors. This distinction should be kept in mind when addressing academic achievement, especially when creating education policy," (Ou). Addressing the root causes of underperformance, such as family issues and community challenges, should be prioritized over disproportionately allocating funds to select districts.

	<p>Thank you for your consideration.</p> <p>Charo Egan</p> <p>Work Cited:</p> <p>Ou, Micheal. "Most student achievement is attributed to out-of-school factors - CHILDREN AT RISK." Children at Risk, 8 June 2021, https://childrenatrisk.org/vlog_student_achievementheath/. Acce</p>
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April 17, 2024

RE: HB 1448 New School Finance Formula

To Speaker McCluskie
Assistant Majority Leader Bacon
Senator Zenzinger
Minority Leader Lundeen

First, I want to thank you for updating our school finance formula to provide funding for the students that need it and eliminating the Budget Stabilization factor. These are two items the education community has been asking about for decades. I support the intent of the bill.

Unfortunately in the process you are cutting funding to six districts. Although you are allocating \$87M/year to create a Funding Floor or hold harmless for these six districts, for 6 years, it still means a significant reduction in funding starting with the graduating class of 2030 (current 6th graders). It is not equitable to reduce funding for any district. After all, equitable does not mean equal and I wholeheartedly endorse all students receiving a fair and equitable education which meets their needs. Students in districts with the proposed cuts will be denied the full education they deserve.

On a 30,000' level (maybe 20-25,000' here in Colorado) the core problem is that the current formula not only has not focused on students' needs but has not kept up with 21st Century needs, technology, counseling, food insecurity, homelessness, behavior issues, safety, teaching to all students, differentiation, teacher training and Professional Development and much more. Districts who have been able to secure mill levy overrides have supplemented the current formula to achieve these modern needs. The original intent was that formula funding would be fair and adequate and overrides would be extras. Since the current formula is inadequate for a modern education, districts who are unable to secure overrides are seriously underfunded.

In the proposed formula by capping the cost-of-living factor, without studying actual costs the assumption is made that we are receiving too much funding. The most recent runs show that Telluride's budget alone will be reduced by \$750K per year under the

new formula. Then add in our 30% mill levy override and the effective cut is \$1M. This is out of an approximately \$13M budget or a 7.7% cut which represents 13 teachers (roughly 10%) or our athletic budget along with extracurricular transportation. It could interfere with acquiring skilled Dual Immersion (DI) teachers to continue our successful program which has just grown into the High School. Last year's CMAS scores showed an inverse achievement gap between the general population and the Latinx subgroup in middle school math. Or it would impact, and possibly eliminate, our counseling and interventionist positions who have created the highest growth in reading acquisition we have seen in years at the elementary school, all while hindering cost of living increases in wages our teachers deserve. It has long been a concern that the cost of living we realize each year is the state average and not our regional, so teachers have already been falling behind.

High property value school districts, such as Telluride, have students of all economic status' together in one school as well as classrooms. We service children of immigrants who are working in our community, locals who drive as much as 30 miles to get to town. Along with families prosperous enough to live in our community. Our students are not all from well-off families.

It might seem that being in a district with high property values we should be able to find new funding sources; however, we have already tapped the sources legally available. In truth this is already not enough for the inflated costs of being 60 miles from the moderate size city of Montrose, 130 miles from Grand Junction and 350 miles from Denver where many meetings, large purchases such as busses and vans and supplies, especially material for construction are located. Do not get me wrong, we love where we live enough to deal with these challenges, but these things increase all our costs. As such many of us live in smaller housing, spend more time commuting, and travel long distances just to buy groceries. This is most likely why the original formula put Cost of Living first because it impacts everything. One example of high costs in Telluride is that a teacher's starting wage is \$50,500 this year. The AMI is about \$100,000 in San Miguel County while the median value of a residential home is \$1M. We lose teachers every year who can't purchase a home in our region. Rent on a 2-bedroom house in the open market is \$3,500/month. We lose new recruits who wish to teach here once they try to find a place to live. Though we are being aggressive in creating employee housing it will never be enough.

Back to other funding sources, our community has already been generous enough to approve funding overrides and bonds. As well the recent property value increases have had an upside, our local share has gone from about 50% to close to 75%, taking some of the burden off the state already. But the proposed formula change would not allow us to take full advantage of our locally sourced overrides since we are at the legal limit such that a reduction in formula funding would create a reduction in override funding. We would not be able to fully fund programs our voters have approved. Grants and donations are not sustained funding and can be capricious while creating silos due to

targeting. Additionally, granting organizations and non-profits do not fund general operations; housing, transportation, school lunches and breakfasts, especially not salaries which are 80% of our budget. The overrides have been used to cover educational needs not covered by the formula, transportation, technology and to supplement teacher salaries. Our local non-profits help with field trips, experiential learning, and teacher appreciation. We take advantage of all of these but at a cost. Applications and follow-up reporting take time. Our administrators work long hours to make this happen, usually 70 to 80 hours per week, 60 hours is considered a short week. We cannot afford Curriculum Coordinators, Assistant Superintendents, Assistant Principals, Granting Consultants, lobbyists, or PR specialists etc. with the current budget.

While this change will save the state approximately \$87M per year, which is small in the scheme of things, it has a huge deleterious impact on our individual budgets. It will be undermining some of the most successful schools because the cost feels too high. There is no way to remedy the impact on the most important people, our students, which is what bothers me the most.

Respectfully,



Cheryl Carstens Miller
Telluride R-1 School Board President