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Commission's Formula Proposal Makes Strides Towards Addressing Equity Gaps Restoring 2011 School Funding Cuts Must be the First Step

For Immediate Release

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Philadelphia—The Education Law Center of Pennsylvania commends the Basic Education Funding Commission for its hard work over the past year. We applaud its members for crossing party lines to work together to address Pennsylvania's most pressing problem: the stark inequalities of our school funding system. The Commission has proposed some necessary steps forward in fixing our broken system.

Too many school districts in Pennsylvania's poor and struggling communities lack the resources needed to provide the thorough and efficient system of education required by our state constitution. By all accounts, our school funding system is the most inequitable in the country. The state's wealthy districts outspend the poorest districts by over 30 percent. And yet, students living in poverty, students with special needs, and English language learners are disproportionately concentrated in the districts where funding cuts have decimated staff and eliminated educational opportunities. Access to quality schools should not depend on one's race or ZIP code.

To solve Pennsylvania's school funding challenges, we must directly address these inequities.

“We are pleased that the Basic Education Funding Commission's proposal uses student and district weights to distribute money,” said Deborah Gordon Klehr, Executive Director of the Education Law Center-PA. “By giving additional weight to students living in poverty—especially to those living in concentrated poverty—the Commission has recognized the significant and unique challenges facing schools that serve our most vulnerable learners. Such districts are often hit with a double whammy: they must serve the most at-risk students while struggling to raise local revenue even as they tax at relatively high rates. The proposed formula takes into account tax capacity, which is critical to securing equity.”

However, the Commission's proposal alone will not solve Pennsylvania's underlying funding inequalities because poor schools still need adequate resources. To truly achieve equity, the General Assembly must commit to investing significant new dollars in the basic education budget beginning with restoring the major cuts that hit poor districts the hardest. In addition, our system will remain broken in the absence of consistent, reliable adequacy targets that ensure that Pennsylvania's students can meet state standards.

Ensuring that all of Pennsylvania's children have equal access to a quality public education.

Before fully implementing a formula, we must first fill the gaping holes in the budgets of our poorest districts.

Making educational equity a reality in Pennsylvania requires persistence. “It is crucial that the General Assembly and Governor commit to a long-term solution that ensures adequate dollars in every classroom,” said Klehr.

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The Education Law Center-PA works to ensure that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English language learners, and children experiencing homelessness. For more information, visit <http://www.elc-pa.org> or follow [@edlawcenterpa](https://twitter.com/edlawcenterpa) on Twitter.