

SUMMARY OF “COSTING-OUT RESOURCES NEEDED” (FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION)

Based on 2007 Costing-Out Study by PA

Key Findings

- ✓ Providing a *basic* quality education for special education students costs, on the average, more than *twice* as much as educating students without special needs.
- ✓ 391 school districts have inadequate funding for special education – averaging an annual average of \$1 million shortfall per year.
- ✓ The average per pupil shortfall is \$1,947.
- ✓ Needs that go under-served include staffing, professional development, and assistive technology devices.
- ✓ Underfunding of special education impacts the education of all students and the wider community.

Pursuant to the 2007 costing-out study, state funding formulas addressed higher costs associated with educating students who live in poverty and English language learners. *However, PA has not significantly altered the formula as it relates funding for special education students.*

Based on 05-06 spending levels, the base cost for educating a student with no special needs was \$8,003. The cost of educating a student eligible for special education to meet state standards is, on average, more than twice the base cost (2.3 times the base.)

*** In Pottstown (06-07,) the average *additional spending* per student for special education was \$12,933. The costing out estimate for that year was \$11,469 per student with special needs.***

Failure to implement funding to meet the cost requirements undermines the ability of school districts to achieve academic standards for all students. When insufficient resources are provided for special education, the quality of education declines for all students.

Why does special education cost more?

- ✓ Ensuring that students with disabilities can meet key learning goals requires additional **time, equipment, technology, materials, personnel, professional** development, and **effort**. Examples of these are additional aides, counselors, teachers, related services, supplementary curricular materials, smaller class sizes, special equipment, and specialized training. In addition, daily preparation time required is increased significantly to accommodate the needs of special education students.
- ✓ Actual resource requirements vary greatly based on individual’s disability and level of need. Approximately 2/3 of special education students have relatively “mild” levels of need. However, there is a great variation in cost within all categories of disability. *And even those with “mild” special educational needs require significant assistance when compared to students with no special needs.*
- ✓ Growing incidences of **mental health issues** compound the levels of need.

- ✓ Every child identified requires intensive **evaluation**, followed by a minimum of several hours of **paperwork** and **meetings** each year.
- ✓ Following LRE mandates, PA has made some progress in providing **inclusionary programming**. However, to execute inclusion also requires significant resources. Educators must devise effective ways to meet individual needs in multiple regular education classrooms. *While research and experience show that appropriate inclusion with diversified instruction can benefit all students, adequate resources are needed to achieve this objective.*
- ✓ In the past five years, special education enrollment has increased by 25,000 students in PA.
- ✓ Scientific advances have provided means to address needs, but have added costs to the provision of specialized services.
- ✓ Parents are more educated about rights, which increased parent involvement, but also increases time spent in meetings working out disagreements, and increases potential for due process and other legal costs.
- ✓ In many cases, qualified personnel are in short supply (psychologists, physical/occupational therapists/speech language therapists, nurses.) In many cases either jobs cannot be filled or districts must pay high salaries/contract fees.

Resources make a difference : Personnel, Professional Development, Assistive Technology, and Specialized Programs

- ✓ Half of all special education students in the fifty wealthiest districts are meeting standards in reading and math, while only ¼ of these students do so in the fifty poorest districts.
- ✓ *All students benefit when teachers are better prepared to provide instruction for diverse learners.*
- ✓ The types of staff most needed in PA schools to serve special education students include those who address three critical needs: inclusion support, improved communication, specialized service delivery.
- ✓ Adding staff—including regular and special education teachers—to reduce class size is one key strategy to meet this challenge. Another strategy is the addition of paraprofessional staff.
- ✓ Training capacity must be provided onsite and must be ongoing. *Full time teacher coaches and disability-specific experts working directly in the school buildings and classrooms are needed to regularly observe and to provide advice and assistance on an ongoing basis.*
- ✓ Depending on the number of students eligible, a full-time staff member may be needed who understands and can explain PA special education laws. Such communication is not just best practice—it's required by state and federal law for special education.
- ✓ Specialized service delivery (psychologists, mental health experts, and behavior specialists) aid in the identification, development of plans, and overseeing the delivery of services.
- ✓ Assistive technology specialists.
- ✓ Literacy specialists.
- ✓ Current professional development resources are inadequate for promoting inclusion, instructional leadership, highly qualified paraprofessionals.
- ✓ Co-teaching model requires higher number of professional staff, training, co-planning time.

- ✓ **Experts call for schools to utilize a “Universal Design” approach.**
- ✓ Specialized programs include summer school & after school programs, expanded transition services, early intervening services, and school-wide PBS.

Strong connections between legal requirements for special education, best practices, and adequate financial resources – **New investments in special education are needed to provide basic, fundamental programs and services.** The benefits include:

- ✓ Allowing districts to provide what the law requires.
- ✓ Improved identification, evaluation, and intervention services.
- ✓ Improved ability to develop and implement IEPs. *More effective delivery of services will allow those students with relatively mild needs to move out of special education.*
- ✓ Improved communication among staff and parents – increases everyone’s understanding and effectiveness.
- ✓ Reduced drop-out rates.
- ✓ Reduced long-term societal costs (improved post-secondary employment and reduced needs for social services.)
- ✓ More highly qualified staff.
- ✓ Improved job satisfaction.
- ✓ Reduced teacher turnover.
- ✓ Healthier school and classroom cultures.