



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FUNDING EDUCATION IS CRITICAL

We believe in public education. When local school systems work in partnership with communities they serve, they can and will educate students successfully. Public education enables students to access opportunities in a rapidly changing, diverse, global society. Public school funding comes from a variety of sources at the local, state, and federal levels.

Samuel Dempsey and Douglas Fuchs wrote a paper for the *Exceptional Children* publication on "flat" versus "weighted" reimbursement formulas: a longitudinal analysis of statewide special education funding practices. The paper looked at the reimbursement strategies and effects on special education service delivery. It was a fascinating read.

In 1983-84, the Tennessee special education funding formula was changed from a "flat" rate to a "weighted" formula. What were the findings? In efforts to generate additional funds, districts saw an opportunity to retain or place children in options that generate a greater amount of service dollars.

In other words? When government funds something, we get more of it. However, that is not always a terrible problem.

For example, we know enrollment in colleges and universities grew rapidly after the passage of the G.I. Bill, government-subsidized student loans, and other programs, which lowered the cost of education for students. Keep in mind the actual price of education did not go down, only the cost seemed more affordable. Demand actually increased the price.

While they were discussing students with disabilities, the similarities are applicable. Dempsey and Fuchs outlined the types of allocation formulas including (a) flat grants, (b) resource-based disbursements, (c) weighted-pupil versions, and (d) cost-based calculations.

They added, "Fiscal and programmatic considerations are associated with each type. That is, just as they vary in how they are calculated, it has been suggested that these formulas also differ in terms of their impact on classification, placement, and distribution of services for students."

Flat grants provide a fixed amount of funds per child, teacher, or classroom unit. They are described as fairly simple to administer, and funds would increase in relationship to the number of students served.

SUMMARY

"Tennessee citizens are ruggedly independent and committed to determining their own destiny, school funding included."

Resource-based formulas support a percentage of personnel salaries or weighted costs of specific program types or units. Resource-based formulas are based on expected state averages and may be limited by a funding or population cap. There is little incentive for over-classification.

Weighted-pupil calculations are based on types of specific children multiplied by an average per-pupil cost or based on a type of weighted formula tied to the type of service or degree of disability. Weights can encourage a misclassification of students. In turn, this generates higher reimbursements. Weighted formulas often are usually not responsive to wide variations in program costs.

Cost-based formulas fund a portion of the overall cost of services provided by a district. Reimbursement could be tied to actual services provided, but cost containment could become an issue.

Under the Constitution, the responsibility for funding public education rests with the states. Many argue the Federal Government has a persuasive national interest in the quality of our public schools. However, many are distrustful of the federal role in public education, especially in expanding it.

Tennessee first supported, and then fought to get away from, national standards. We are still seeing vestiges of the battle over Common Core State Standards in our state. The same is true of creating national assessments and testing. They were not popular in Tennessee. Tennessee citizens are ruggedly independent and committed to determining their own destiny, school funding included.

Currently, federal, state, and local governments fund K–12 public education. The federal contribution comes mainly from two sources: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). ESSA provides categorical funding to support student achievement in low-income areas. IDEA accounts for the bulk of the federal government's subsidy to special education.

Tennessee is about to engage in a vigorous debate on school funding at the state level. The debate will have many questions that must be answered before moving changes in the funding forward this legislative session. We must commit to taking the time and getting this issue right.

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