

State Should Fund the Gap

Our Legislature and Governor should be ashamed of their recent school funding plan. It is unconstitutional, bad public policy and increases the gap between the actual costs of providing an adequate education and meeting state educational mandates and the state funding provided to meet these requirements. The result is that local property tax payers will again bear the burden of paying for these state educational requirements.

The State told us that the total cost of an adequate education in 2004 was \$895 million in New Hampshire and now a year later the State contends that the cost will decrease to \$802 million for 2005. How? Actual educational costs in New Hampshire are not decreasing and actual educational expenditures continue to rise. The latest state figures available show that educational expenditures in New Hampshire were \$1.9 billion in 2002. About 70 percent of educational operating expenditures are due to salaries and benefits and those expenditures continue to increase annually. The majority of the remaining expenses go towards meeting state educational mandates.

These state educational mandates are good as they require schools to provide students with programs and services that will help them obtain the essential skills they need to be successful in school and in life. But, they are state requirements and the state should pay for them. The state's funding plan leaves local communities with the burden of funding the gap between the actual cost of these educational mandates and the inadequate state funding to cover these costs. Local districts must pay for the gap through local property taxes which results in disproportionate tax burdens from community to community.

The recent plan hits property poor communities hard. Take Claremont as an example. In 2004, the State said the cost of an adequate education in Claremont was \$10,104,026 which means the state provided that amount of funding to Claremont through the "state property tax" and an adequate education grant. Now a year later, that figure has magically decreased to \$9,550,271 for 2005. Why? Educational costs continue to increase in Claremont as they do in other communities. Claremont's actual expenditures in 2003 were over \$20 million dollars which means Claremont has to fund the huge gap between the amount they receive from the State and their remaining educational expenses which are due in large part to pay for state educational requirements.

Politicians including the Governor ran on a platform of no new taxes. They all broke that promise by raising local property taxes. Governor Benson's solution now appears to be again hiding behind efforts to pass a constitutional amendment so that the State can continue to increase local property taxes indefinitely without any concern that a court may say it is unconstitutional to do so.

What politicians should be working towards is funding the gap. The State should pay for its educational mandates and determine the true cost of an adequate education which should be based on the state's mandates. Everyone knows this cost is far more than what the State is currently providing and until we hold our Legislators and Governor accountable for their actions, we will never make any progress in school funding.

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