

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
MAJORITY CAUCUS ROOM
ROOM 140
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2009
1:35 P.M.

PRESENTATION ON SENATE BILL 850

PANEL 9 OF 15

BEFORE:

HONORABLE DWIGHT EVANS, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE MATTHEW D. BRADFORD
HONORABLE WILLIAM C. KORTZ III
HONORABLE DEBERAH KULA
HONORABLE BRYAN R. LENTZ
HONORABLE TIM MAHONEY
HONORABLE JOSH SHAPIRO
HONORABLE MATTHEW SMITH
HONORABLE MARIO J. CIVERA, JR., MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE GORDON DENLINGER
HONORABLE JOHN R. EVANS
HONORABLE MAUREE GINGRICH
HONORABLE DAVID R. MILLARD
HONORABLE RON MILLER
HONORABLE DOUGLAS G. REICHLEY
HONORABLE RICHARD R. STEVENSON

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

HONORABLE KEVIN P. MURPHY

JEAN DAVIS REPORTING

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ALSO PRESENT:
MIRIAM A. FOX
MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EDWARD J. NOLAN
MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEBRA B. MILLER
REPORTER

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P R O C E E D I N G S

* * *

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: What I would like to do is start, go down the line and introduce yourself for the purpose of the stenographer, and then you can begin.

So we'll start with you.

MR. FALK: I'm Robert Falk. I'm currently serving---

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: What's your name again?

MR. FALK: Robert Falk.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Robert Falk.

MR. FALK: I'm currently serving my 18th year as Superintendent for the Otto-Eldred School District, and I'm Secretary for the Board of Directors for the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Okay.

And who are you?

MR. BURNETT: My name is Julian David Burnett, a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, currently residing in Philadelphia County.

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Okay.

1 MR. BURNETT: I am a private citizen here to
2 testify on 850. I'm also a union representative and
3 a member of those fraternities.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Okay; sure.

5 And you are?

6 MISS WESTCOTT: I'm Elise Westcott from
7 Juniata County.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Juniata County.
9 Okay; sure.

10 MS. JORDAN: I'm Maureen Jordan. I'm the
11 mother of Elise Westcott, and I'm with the Arc of
12 Pennsylvania. I'm here to help her.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Okay.

14 MS. BARTLEY: I'm Marianne Bartley, and I am
15 the President-elect of the Pennsylvania League of
16 Urban Schools and the Superintendent of Lebanon
17 School District.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Okay.

19 Well, do we want to start with you, and then
20 we can go back. We'll start with you.

21 MS. BARTLEY: Thank you.

22 Well, I would like to start by thanking you
23 for the opportunity to address you today. As the
24 Committee on Appropriations in the House, certainly
25 you have a lot of things to consider.

1 Today, I'm going to share with you the
2 perspective of Lebanon School District and
3 Senate Bill 850 and how this impacts us.

4 But as I share the specifics for Lebanon,
5 please know that I represent many of the urban
6 districts like Lebanon from Reading, Lancaster, York,
7 Williamsport, Johnstown, Chester Upland, Pittsburgh,
8 Philadelphia. All of the districts in the
9 Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools are certainly
10 concerned, very concerned, about Senate Bill 850.

11 In Lebanon School District, over the past
12 7 years I have seen our fund balance go down, and we
13 are finally getting to a point where we are bringing
14 it back to the positive.

15 And I know that you have a copy of the
16 testimony that I have provided, but there's a graph
17 on there and you would see very clearly that for a
18 number of years, we have been in the red. So our
19 funding in our school district has not been in a
20 healthy situation.

21 We are finally at a point where we are
22 hitting the mark where we will have a fund balance
23 again. Although very tiny, we are moving in the
24 right direction.

25 Over the past 7 years, we have done a lot

1 with a little bit of money, things from renovations
2 of buildings to just continually trying to provide
3 for our students.

4 Our school district includes about 4,500
5 students, and we have 8 schools. We are small. We
6 are only within a 4 1/2-square-mile area. But we
7 have 70 percent of our students on free or reduced
8 lunch, and our school district is also 53 percent
9 minority with a high population of ESL students.

10 I would like to just compare what would
11 happen in our district if Senate Bill 850 went
12 through compared with what the Governor's budget
13 proposed for us.

14 If the district received the Governor's
15 budget, we would be in very good shape. It would
16 really change the outlook for our district.

17 We would need a very small tax increase, and
18 that would just be because we are working on
19 renovations. Our high school needs to be renovated.
20 It was built in '69, and it needs to be updated
21 completely.

22 If that bill, if the Governor's budget went
23 through for us, it would mean that my taxpayers would
24 have a small increase of about \$30 a year, which is a
25 2-mill increase, or 1.7 percent.

1 But if you were to flip over, you would see
2 a big difference between Senate Bill 850 and what
3 that would mean for our schools. The average
4 homeowner increase would be at least \$200, and it's
5 more than five times as much.

6 And with that, what would happen is we would
7 have a reduction in staff for K4 and K5 programs.
8 That's a real problem for us and for many, many
9 districts.

10 To cut full-day kindergarten for 4- and
11 5-year-olds in a high-poverty area is not a good
12 practice, and that's what we would have to do, even
13 with that tax increase I just described to you.

14 We would have no funds for alternative
15 education. Right now we have a school called
16 Polaris School, and we would not have funding if we
17 were receiving the funds proposed in the Senate
18 budget. We would only get funding if it came through
19 a demonstration grant.

20 We would also lose funding for Classrooms
21 for the Future, and that has been a terrific program
22 in our schools.

23 We would lose funding for Science: It's
24 Elementary.

25 We would lose funding for Dual Enrollment,

1 and 21st Century programs would be stopped.

2 We would have drastic cuts of 50 percent or
3 more for Pre-K Counts, and Head Start supplemental
4 assistance is reduced.

5 We would lose our ability to apply for
6 Race to the Top funding. That impacts so many things
7 in our districts. We would have no technology
8 upgrades in media centers and classrooms.

9 So these kinds of things are obviously very
10 upsetting to us, and we need your full consideration
11 in reviewing the education budget. And please,
12 consider the impact of 850 on what schools are faced
13 with.

14 This morning, I was with one of my board
15 members who has been a board member for over
16 30 years, and she said please remind the
17 Appropriations Committee that we are faced with these
18 timelines where we have to make decisions and pass
19 our budgets by the end of June, and with the
20 uncertainty, we are really put in a precarious
21 situation.

22 If the Senate budget is what becomes our
23 budget, we will be faced with drastic cuts, and it's
24 going to be a very difficult situation for schools
25 and communities.

1 We believe that education affects the
2 economic vitality of this State, and it's certainly
3 important to put funds in education.

4 With that, I thank you for your attention.

5 MS. JORDAN: My name is Maureen Jordan. I'm
6 a Public Policy Advocate with the Arc of
7 Pennsylvania. I have been there just a little under
8 a year.

9 But that's not the role. We did submit
10 formal testimony to you, which we'll be getting from
11 the Arc of Pennsylvania. But I'm here representing
12 my daughter, Elise Westcott, which has been the
13 purpose of my advocacy for the last 23 years -- as a
14 mother receiving services, at one point in my life as
15 a single mother trying to raise three children, one
16 with a disability.

17 But I just want to put a face to, you hear a
18 lot about -- excuse me; I'm at the end of a cold, and
19 it's just getting to the point of all better now.

20 You hear a lot about services, and I just
21 wanted to put a face to what "services" is.

22 There is so much that we use in our industry
23 to represent things, but nothing represents like an
24 actual face. So that is why Elise has come today, to
25 explain to you what services she receives, what will

1 happen to her and her peers and her friends if these
2 services were cut.

3 We have a pretty independent lifestyle.
4 Elise does amazing things. She'll tell you some of
5 the things she does. But we are representing those
6 that might not have a mother that can advocate
7 because they are older and there are family members
8 who are not able to, or someone who needs more
9 supports as far as physical supports, supports with
10 their ADLs, their activities of daily living.

11 So even though you see us here, we are
12 trying to represent those in the intellectual
13 disabilities field so you can at least put a face
14 with your testimony, and you have received many fine
15 testimonies today just from seeing the list.

16 So I will turn it over to Elise, because
17 she's the purpose today.

18 MISS WESTCOTT: Thank you very much.

19 My name is Elise Westcott.

20 MS. JORDAN: Tell them what you like.

21 MISS WESTCOTT: I like horses. I ride them,
22 until the show.

23 MS. JORDAN: What do you do every afternoon?

24 MISS WESTCOTT: Milk cows.

25 MS. JORDAN: She works on a dairy farm.

1 What services do you receive?

2 MISS WESTCOTT: Nursing care.

3 MS. JORDAN: Can you tell them about that a
4 little bit more?

5 MISS WESTCOTT: I was in the hospital for a
6 reaction with Prednisone, and I had to go into a
7 group home. If there wasn't any services, I would be
8 stuck in the hospital.

9 MS. JORDAN: What other services?

10 MISS WESTCOTT: Transportation, and lots of
11 stuff, hab aides and stuff.

12 MS. JORDAN: Day programs.

13 MISS WESTCOTT: Day programs.

14 MS. JORDAN: What would it be like if you
15 weren't able to have these services?

16 MISS WESTCOTT: Stuck at home.

17 MS. JORDAN: Anything else you want to
18 say?

19 MISS WESTCOTT: Thank you.

20 MR. BURNETT: Good afternoon, and I would
21 like to thank you -- pardon me. I'm a bit nervous.
22 It's the first time testifying in front of the
23 Legislature.

24 I want to say thank you for inviting me to
25 the process and for the transparency of it all.

1 And also, thank you for the opportunity just
2 really to hear the testimony of all these great
3 people, both today and yesterday, especially from the
4 organizations and the hospitals---

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Take your time.
6 Slow down.

7 MR. BURNETT: Okay; all right.

8 I would like to thank you all. Well, my
9 thank-yous are out of the way.

10 And I would also like to thank you for the
11 job that you guys have done to this point. Given the
12 economic situation of the country, I believe that
13 Pennsylvania is in a pretty good place. Not the best
14 in the world, but we are surviving.

15 And in order to survive in the future, I do
16 believe that funding is needed to provide for the
17 services for my testimony made here, and quite
18 honestly, even for the inner-city hospitals and the
19 different programs that are in the inner-city.

20 Now, yesterday, one of the things that
21 really stuck out to me yesterday was the testimony
22 from Albert Einstein Hospital and how much they are
23 affected by the Medicaid funding.

24 When you drive down the street and you see
25 this big hospital that has been standing there for

1 years, you just take it for granted that they are
2 going to be there and those services are going to be
3 there and that you can go there for your services if
4 you are in trouble. Without this funding, it just
5 won't happen and people will be out on the street.

6 And as far as the educational programs and
7 the after-school programs and the different funding
8 for those, I know personally that without those
9 programs, younger individuals there are just running
10 the street wild. They have no direction; they have
11 no purpose. And when you have after-school jobs and
12 different other programs where you can instill these
13 different values into a person, then they will grow
14 up to be a productive taxpaying citizen.

15 Now, as far as the nursing homes, my mother
16 lives in a Medicaid assisted nursing home. Without
17 that funding, hey, she'll have to live with me. You
18 know, I wouldn't mind, I love my mother dearly, but
19 she loves her independence also.

20 And also, my cousin, he's deaf. Well, he is
21 deaf, and he attended the School for the Deaf outside
22 of Philadelphia, and now he is currently working as
23 an aircraft mechanic. His friend, who wasn't privy
24 to those same services, he is currently serving time
25 at Frackville.

1 So it really comes down to, are we going to
2 invest in today to make tomorrow better so we can
3 have these taxpaying citizens there?

4 Now, as far as the Governor's proposal, what
5 is proposed there I really don't know, because a lot
6 of emphasis was given here on the bill 850.

7 Now, but one question I would like to know
8 is, the question that was brought up yesterday was,
9 how much of the funds could be used from the funds
10 under the 850 bill? And I do not support it. I do
11 not support it, but that is a question that we'll get
12 an answer to eventually.

13 And I guess in short, I mean, like I said, I
14 don't have any statistics and numbers and everything,
15 and I'm pretty sure you guys have heard everything.
16 And even with this heartfelt testimony here, I do
17 believe that even though this bill may have been
18 drafted from an economic standpoint, from the
19 standpoint of accountants and CEOs and CFOs, but now
20 seeing this human side of it, I trust that you all
21 will not let this pass.

22 I'm not worried about it as some of my
23 brethren are in the Masonic Home in Elizabethtown who
24 called me last night and implored me to let you guys
25 know that they are petrified. A few of them were

1 here yesterday, but I'm here to reiterate for
2 them.

3 Once again, thank you for allowing me to
4 really just learn about the process and see how the
5 Commonwealth works, and thank you.

6 MR. FALK: Good afternoon.

7 As I said earlier, I'm Robert Falk,
8 Superintendent for the Otto-Eldred School District,
9 and I have been in this chair for 18 years in that
10 district.

11 I sincerely thank you for providing me the
12 opportunity to present you what I call the potential
13 dilemma created for us if Senate Bill 850 should
14 become our budget bill.

15 The Otto-Eldred School District is a small,
16 poor, rural school district in the northernmost
17 boundary of McKean County, Martin Causer's district.
18 We border New York State.

19 Demographic data for us is rather bleak.
20 Total assessed property value for the school district
21 is slightly less than \$90 million. That data is a
22 year old. It is slightly higher than that now.

23 But to put that in perspective, last month I
24 was playing golf on a golf course in State College.
25 I stood on a T-box and I looked around. It was an

1 elevated box, and I could see two housing
2 developments that 15 years ago were farms.

3 Those two housing developments, when I
4 counted the homes and put my appraised value on
5 those properties, I could see from that T-box more
6 property value than the 88 square miles of my school
7 district.

8 The annual household income for my school
9 district residents -- \$35,000. Market value aid
10 ratio for us -- .8293. Many of the years during my
11 term as superintendent, we were classified as the
12 "poorest school district in the State." I believe
13 now we may be one or two from the bottom.

14 I'm going to show you the next page in my
15 testimony packet. There's a pie chart that shows you
16 that 57 percent of our total budget is received from
17 the State as basic education subsidy. Tax revenue
18 for our budget is only 16 percent.

19 To continue with the description of our
20 bleak demographics, I would like to direct you to the
21 next page of my packet that is from Standard &
22 Poor's, and it's the "School Matters" information.

23 I'm going to point out to you in that packet
24 that the adults in our community with a bachelor's
25 degree -- 9.4 percent of our adults have a bachelor's

1 degree. Eight-three percent of them have a
2 high school diploma, fortunately.

3 Economically disadvantaged households, the
4 Standard & Poor's data indicates that 47.7 percent of
5 our students come from free-and-reduced-lunch
6 families. That has now increased to 51 percent.

7 However, we are poor, we are rural, we are
8 disadvantaged, but that same "School Matters" data
9 shows that our school-wide reading proficiency is at
10 72.5 percent and our school-wide math proficiency is
11 at 83.8 percent.

12 When you consider that 20 percent of our
13 students are also special education-identified
14 students -- I have some teachers that are doing some
15 exemplary work and allowing and creating activities
16 and opportunities for kids to achieve.

17 Obviously when preparing our General Fund
18 budget, we look at all programs and make funding
19 decisions based on the effectiveness of our programs
20 or initiatives. Data analysis has become an integral
21 component and a way for us to quantify our
22 effectiveness.

23 In other words, are we having a significant
24 impact on student achievement, and are we
25 substantiating the costs for those initiatives? And

1 I am here to show you that we are.

2 But rather than sit here and read
3 continually from a multipage document, I'm going to
4 give you a quick snapshot of data analysis and show
5 you some real data from our school district,
6 particularly the kindergarten program.

7 We have three programs that I would like to
8 talk about very briefly, one of them being our
9 preschool and our kindergarten program; the other,
10 class-size reduction; and the third, dual enrollment.

11 So if you look in my testimony packet, you
12 are going to see Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early
13 Literacy Skills. We call that DIBELS.

14 DIBELS is a way for us to quantify
15 achievement of kindergarten students. We are all
16 aware that we can test third graders and above with
17 PSSA, we can test them with other standardized
18 achievement tests, but there is not a lot of good
19 data out there that is showing that kindergarten
20 students are achieving, and how do we test that to
21 really prove it?

22 So in my school district, we use DIBELS.
23 And we have reduced class size to 15 to 18 students
24 per class in kindergarten. We did that with
25 class-size reduction money as part of the

1 accountability block grant. And I also have two
2 preschool classes that are feeder programs for our
3 kindergarten class.

4 And the first page in our DIBELS packet, I
5 highlighted in pink for you the line "35."
6 Thirty-five is the benchmark goal at the end of
7 kindergarten. We would like these students, when
8 they are evaluated on this specific item, to be at 35
9 or better.

10 The sheet that I'm showing you first shows
11 you that they started in the middle of the year, and
12 that's the square box on the bottom of each line.
13 That line is then extended above the 35
14 significantly, indicating that our kindergarten
15 students have reached what would have been the
16 end-of-year benchmark, but not only have they reached
17 it, they have surpassed it.

18 If you want a way to compare that to
19 something, compare that to what we look at as the
20 proficiency or the above-proficiency level on PSSA.
21 So my teachers tell me that their kindergarten
22 students are making AYP, and many of them are scoring
23 what they would classify as a proficient level.

24 Now, the DIBELS allows us to test every kid
25 in various items.

1 Now, Phoneme Segmentation

2 Fluency. It's a prereading skill.

3 The next page, Initial Sound Fluency. Think
4 about consonant sounds, vowel sounds. Look where our
5 students were at the beginning of the year. They
6 were all in the 5 to 10, a couple of them in the
7 15 range.

8 Benchmark for midyear is 25, which is in the
9 middle of kindergarten. Those students in this
10 teacher's particular class, all of them were above
11 the midyear point, and some of them significantly
12 higher than the midyear point.

13 So my teachers are telling me that reduced
14 class size at the primary levels and a high-quality
15 preschool program has improved achievement of our
16 kindergarten students, and I agree with them.

17 There are more pages like that, and I really
18 don't need to go through all of them for you, but
19 they all show that we are doing very well.

20 There are one or two students that you will
21 notice in the chart did not progress. One of them is
22 a family that moved, and another one I know what will
23 happen.

24 The student is not achieving well because
25 the student is not attending kindergarten on a

1 regular basis. We put pressure on the parent to
2 bring their child to school.

3 In a couple of years, that parent is going
4 to get tired of our pressure requiring them to follow
5 our compulsory attendance laws. That particular
6 student -- and I can guarantee this as I sit here; in
7 3 years you can ask me this -- that student will be
8 enrolled in a cyber charter school because the parent
9 can get a free computer, get free Internet
10 connection, and they are free from us and we have no
11 control over what they are doing. And we then are
12 losing \$8,000 to \$12,000 of our subsidy to that
13 charter school.

14 And ironically, this week I received a
15 letter from the Department of Education telling me
16 that I was losing money to the charter school. The
17 next day I got a letter from the Secretary of Ed
18 telling me that that particular charter school was
19 under investigation.

20 And I'm not anti-charter school by any
21 means, but we need an opportunity to control charter
22 schools. If we have students there, let us make sure
23 that they are attending, quote, unquote, "on a daily
24 basis" and not just turning the computer on and then
25 being classified as having attended.

1 But what it does in the rural corners of the
2 State, it becomes the opportunity for parents to
3 avoid attending public schools by saying they are in
4 a charter school, because their kids don't need to
5 follow our rules and the parents don't want us
6 pressuring them to attend.

7 By all means, charter schools have their
8 purpose, and I know there are very good ones, but
9 there are some abuses taking place that we need a way
10 to stop those abuses.

11 So if we go beyond my kindergarten charts, I
12 have something that isn't in your packet. One of my
13 colleagues in Potter County just completed his
14 doctoral dissertation and defended it about a month
15 ago, and when I told him yesterday I was coming down
16 here to talk about this, he said, "Well, I have
17 something that you should share, and it came out of
18 my dissertation."

19 His dissertation was a study of
20 prekindergarten students through fourth grade and the
21 impact that pre-K, preschool, prekindergarten
22 programs, have on achievement. And he showed that
23 there was a significant difference in the achievement
24 levels of students as far as fourth grade in the four
25 Potter County schools for those students that had

1 attended pre-K programs and those that had not.

2 So I guess as you can tell, I'm a proponent
3 of pre-K and early childhood education.

4 Now, the next page in my document, I'm going
5 to read to you.

6 The class-size-reduction initiative has been
7 the single most effective use of accountability block
8 grant funds to effectively enhance achievement of
9 students in the primary grades.

10 The data that I have shown you gave us a way
11 to quantify that, something we have not been able to
12 do in the past.

13 The following pages verify that our students
14 are scoring well, but equally important is the
15 indication that our special education students are
16 also showing significant gains.

17 Additionally, as a result of our preschool
18 program and small class sizes, we are gradually
19 reducing the number of special education
20 placements.

21 My teachers convinced me 4 years ago that
22 that would happen, and it is happening. I am able to
23 eliminate and transfer a halftime special education
24 teacher out of my primary-level grades because our
25 placement numbers are being reduced.

1 The next page is a graph showing you that
2 70.2 percent of our students in grade 3 were scoring
3 at a proficiency level in reading or better. The
4 State average is 72.8.

5 Again, looking at our demographics, that's a
6 significant gain for us, and we are currently ranking
7 in the top 2 schools out of the 14 school districts
8 in my IU for PSSA results.

9 Our math results at third grade --
10 80.8 percent of our third graders proficient or
11 better. Again, good teachers doing hard work as a
12 result of accountability block grant money that
13 allowed us to reduce class size.

14 The next page is some Special Education Data
15 Report. I highlighted a box in yellow because I
16 wanted to point out that 42 percent of our special ed
17 students were scoring at proficiency rate. That's a
18 good number for us.

19 When we say all kids can learn, it's
20 difficult, but yes, they can.

21 Effectiveness is not limited to our
22 elementary school. As you'll see when reviewing the
23 next two pages, dual enrollment courses are providing
24 poor rural students an opportunity to earn college
25 credits while attending high school.

1 But more importantly, they are building
2 their self-esteem, proving they can succeed at the
3 college level. Students have the potential to leave
4 our high school with more than 24 earned college
5 credits that are transferrable to the college of
6 their choice.

7 We don't have a community college in our
8 area. I think the nearest community college to my
9 school district is probably 125 miles away in
10 Williamsport, or 70 miles to the
11 Jamestown Community College Campus in Warren County.

12 So we use our staff, master's degree
13 teachers, to provide college curriculum during the
14 day in our high school, and they get dual credit for
15 that.

16 The next page shows you the number of
17 students that were enrolled this year. We were
18 offering college courses in the microcomputing
19 business, English composition, general chemistry with
20 lab, psychology, history, and history II.

21 Ninety students, ninety seats -- now, some
22 of these students may have taken more than one course
23 -- but 90 student seats benefited from our dual
24 enrollment program. Twenty-eight of those kids are
25 low-income students.

1 And my principal gave me his schedule for
2 next year for dual enrollment should we have the
3 funding to continue the program. We have added
4 courses. We have added calculus. We have added
5 Spanish. We have added modern physics. We now can
6 offer 27 credits of dual enrollment courses in a
7 high school that only has 350 kids.

8 Okay. As I start to come near the end of my
9 time, by now you may have observed that I have a
10 strong conviction for education of rural students.
11 My conviction pales in comparison to that of the
12 teachers that I hold accountable on a daily basis.

13 Contrary to the belief of some, public
14 schoolteachers are dedicated, industrious people, and
15 when given appropriate direction and resources, are
16 willing to be held accountable for their work.

17 No question about it; when we start a school
18 year and we bring teachers into our meeting rooms and
19 tell them they have 15 kids, they cringe, because
20 they know that they are going to be held very
21 accountable, and all of them are up to the task and
22 produce for us.

23 Where the teachers have a complaint -- and I
24 support their position on this -- is when we set
25 lofty, unrealistic goals for them and we do not

1 provide the necessary tools and resources needed to
2 achieve those goals.

3 Incrementally increasing the achievement
4 level as we see it in NCLB is an admirable goal. Can
5 we achieve it statewide as it is currently designed?
6 I'm not sure about that.

7 We will all try, and we have continued to
8 try. We have met those goals up to this point. But
9 if we don't provide the resources we need -- and I'm
10 speaking specifically of the financial resources --
11 it won't happen.

12 If my school district's budget is changed
13 from our preliminary budget to be reflective of
14 Senate Bill 850, the gains we are currently making
15 will be lost.

16 Analysis of the next page indicates where
17 I will be forced to cut expenses or raise local
18 property taxes by 5.05 mills, which equals
19 31.5 percent.

20 On the next page I'm showing you that I
21 would be eliminating two teacher aides at the
22 kindergarten level, and I would furlough two teachers
23 at the elementary school level.

24 I needed a high school generator for
25 power-outage situations. We lose power often in the

1 north tier.

2 We were going to buy a new elementary
3 science curriculum, high school library, security
4 system, and textbooks and computer upgrades and
5 replacements. The total money that I'm talking about
6 there -- \$377,400.

7 That is the money that I would be losing if
8 Senate Bill 850 is passed as it is and we don't get
9 advantage of the stimulus money that was intended to
10 be a stimulus, not meet the minimum requirement
11 dollars.

12 If that happens, I would need 5.05 mills,
13 which 1 mill generates only \$74,000 for my district.
14 That's about a \$450 increase per household. The
15 median tax in my district is a little over \$500.

16 If a budget bill is passed that is
17 reflective of House Bill 850, I would suggest that
18 you allow us as districts to do something we have not
19 been allowed to do, and I really don't want to do
20 this, but you would need to change the School Code
21 for us, because we can't furlough for economic
22 reasons.

23 The collective bargaining agreement that I
24 have negotiated with our teachers requires that we
25 notify teachers a specific number of days in advance

1 before a furlough. The clock has already starting
2 ticking on that. I can't furlough these two teachers
3 without grievances if we have a reduced funding
4 budget, because I would be violating their
5 contractual rights.

6 Because we are limited to the amount of tax
7 increase set forth by the index -- in my case, as a
8 result of Act 1, I can only raise .6 mills, because
9 that is where I would be with the level of index. So
10 not only can I not raise 5.05 mills; I have a maximum
11 of .6 mills. So the numbers that I showed you that I
12 would be cutting, those are real.

13 If we are level funded, as I said, those
14 numbers are real, but what happens in 2 years when
15 the stimulus funds that brought us to level funding
16 are gone?

17 If my information from PDE is correct, we
18 will have \$4.5 billion in a basic education funding
19 appropriation, which is a 13-percent reduction in
20 basic education from where we are today for the
21 2008-2009 budget.

22 This is the reverse direction from where we
23 should be headed if we are to meet the goals set in
24 the funding formula that was created and implemented
25 last year and provided us an opportunity to set

1 long-range goals at a district level, if we could
2 depend on that funding to increase based on that
3 formula.

4 We had a situation similar to this several
5 years ago under Governor Ridge's Administration. If
6 you'll remember, retirement contributions by the
7 school districts was reduced, and we were told there
8 is no funding increase. But by reducing the
9 district's contribution to the PSERS Fund, you in
10 essence are realizing a gain. Sure we were, for a
11 couple of years. Now look where we are with our
12 plans for what's going to happen to the increase in
13 the next 4 years in retirement contributions.

14 I think in hindsight, maybe we should have
15 kept those numbers up where they were or somewhere
16 higher than what we reduced them to. To me, that was
17 sort of a charade game that we played.

18 I respectfully ask that you consider the
19 achievement of poor and rural students as the
20 important topic that I am expressing it to be.

21 I encourage you to support education and
22 consider the funding formula as a means to achieve
23 adequate funding for all schools.

24 The descriptions that I'm giving you, my
25 students are very similar to the students that you

1 would see in a school district like Lebanon or a
2 school district in an urban center-city environment.
3 There's a lot of data that shows that rural education
4 problems are very similar to urban education
5 problems.

6 With all that said, I thank you for
7 listening to me, giving me an opportunity to
8 editorialize a little, probably more than I should
9 have on my personal opinions. But as a
10 representative of rural school districts, I encourage
11 you to work in a direction that leads us somewhere
12 near the funding formula that we have seen in the
13 past.

14 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

15 MR. BURNETT: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Yes?

17 MR. BURNETT: Pardon me.

18 One thing I did forget, I said I attended
19 yesterday, and I took the information on this
20 Senate Bill 850 to my economics class that I have in
21 the evenings on Thursday, and I received an A for
22 participation. I would like to thank you for that.

23 And also, as a solution, we took a poll of
24 all the students that were in the classes last night
25 as far as a solution, and what I have seen is there's

1 a general sense of responsibility that, hey, we are
2 in rough economic times, so let's all share the
3 increase in taxes and not just put it on a wealthy
4 few, but let's all take the tax burden to help us pay
5 this and fund these goals so we can make changes.

6 Thank you.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: Thank you very
8 much.

9 MR. BURNETT: You're welcome.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN EVANS: One, I want to
11 thank all of you in your comments and your thoughts.
12 I think that my staff has collected your testimony.

13 I'm glad you joined this conversation,
14 because that's what this is. It is our attempt,
15 Democrat and Republican alike, to work together to be
16 Pennsylvanians and to do what is necessary.

17 Again, I would like to thank you sincerely
18 for testifying before us. Thank you very much.

19

20 (The hearing concluded at 2:12 p.m.)

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1 I hereby certify that the proceedings and
2 evidence are contained fully and accurately in the
3 notes taken by me on the within proceedings and that
4 this is a correct transcript of the same.

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Debra B. Miller, Reporter

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