



Making public schools great for every child

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Mark Desetti, Testimony
SB 273
Senate Ways & Means Committee
March 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on SB 273. We stand today in opposition to this bill.

We believe the formula is not complicated, it has not been found to be unconstitutional, but it is underfunded and has been for some time now.

Some may believe that it is simply time to rewrite the formula. Perhaps that is so. But we need to remember that the elements of the current formula were designed with a rational basis. When needs were identified, the formula was adjusted. This is why we have at-risk weighting, bilingual weighting, transportation weighting, low-enrollment weighting and so on. This is why tweaks have been made over the years to address cost of living, dense urban poverty, and virtual schools. And the use of these so-called “silos” was intended to create accountability. When it was found that bilingual students needed additional resources, bilingual weighting was created and later adjusted. That money has a purpose. And you should expect to see that it is used for that purpose.

Beyond our confidence in the current formula, there is the issue of repealing it and creating a temporary fix while a new formula is written. If you hold to the belief that a new formula is needed (and again, we don't hold to that belief), then we understand that you want to create a new formula. But the idea of repealing one formula before the other is ready is something we oppose.

I would liken it to the time I quit my job without having another lined up. With a wife and four children, that was definitely a bad idea. I would not advise anyone to do the same.

In this case, you are expecting a new formula to be ready to go in two years but I would note that two different Legislatures would be writing this new formula - there is an election in the middle of this two-year period. As you know, one Legislature cannot bind the next. What would happen if halfway through the process, the new Legislature decided to throw out the work and begin anew?

If the desire of the Governor and a majority in the Legislature is to flat fund education until a new formula is written, we would suggest the better way to go is to flat fund the current formula while you write a new one.

Understand, however, that we do not believe flat-funding is appropriate. The formula is not broken; it is underfunded and we would urge the legislature to get about the business of restoring the state's revenue stream and then restoring the cuts made to education in the aftermath of the recession and the tax cuts.