

Good morning, my name is Brad Ferko and I would like to thank the Basic Education Funding Commission for the opportunity to testify today. I am currently the Superintendent of Schools for the Sharpsville Area School District. I have over 30 years in service to the public in education, and 10 of them years have been as a Superintendent.

Sharpsville Area School District is located in Mercer County and has a population of approximately 1300 students. We have a K-5 building and another building that is divided between a 608 Middle School and a 9-12 High School. Our demographics support a 10% special education, and a 37% economically disadvantaged. However, our High School has received the Silver Award from the Pittsburgh Business Times and our Middle School received the Governor's Award due to the fact that the school scored above a 90 on the School Performance Profile.

The citizens of Sharpsville, Clark and South Pymatuning have chosen to take on much of the responsibility for paying for a local school due to the fact that they believe in the positives that a smaller school can provide. There is a certain pride that you can hear in the voice of community members and students all the way to first grade as they respond in unity and pride "We are Sharpsville." However, recent cuts in public education and the burden of unfunded mandates are making smaller schools make choices that affect the lives of their students;

- 1) Full day kindergarten vs. technology (it should be noted that Sharpsville Area Schools have only had District-wide wireless network since the beginning of this year)
- 2) Elimination of Class Aides that support the hard work of our teachers and that provide an additional set of eyes, ears and hands.
- 3) How do we fund the Project-Based Assessment, for students that have not met proficiency on the Keystones?
- 4) How do we update our buildings without the assistance of Plan Con?
- 5) How do we continue to update our curriculum so our students have a working knowledge of STEM and STEAM, focusing on higher critical thinking skills and having all students proficient at Levels II, III, and IV of Depth of Knowledge?

Sharpsville Area School District has done many things that some would say are impossible; through collaboration with our local unions , our teachers have taken a pay freeze and concessions on their health benefits, we have brought back programs for Autistic students and Emotional Support students, not to save money, but because we believe that students should be educated in their neighborhood schools, we have added AP courses, IBOTS, and Zulama to our curriculum through budget cuts in other areas. However, each time we have used more of our fund balance to make these new programs a reality.

It is imperative that the Commonwealth develops an Educational Funding formula that is:

- Fair and sustainable
- Provides pension reform and relief
- Addresses special education costs fairly
- Removes unfunded mandates placed on school districts in the name of accountability
- Addresses inequities in Charter school funding and performance

If these challenges are not met by you as policy makers, the future is bleak for the small community schools. The needs of the children must be first in all of your minds and an equitable educational funding formula provides a level playing field for all to benefit. I have never backed away from competition and would gladly place our students and staff next to any in the Commonwealth, just imagine where we could go with equitable funding for programs. There is too much at stake!