



WEST PERRY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Good morning and thank you, my name is Charles Thiemann and for the past 9 ½ years I have been honored to be the President of the Board of the West Perry School District. I would like to tell you a little about West Perry and why equitable and adequate funding is so important to us.

The District was formed in the 1960's by the merger of three existing schools, the District covers over 325 square miles in the western two-thirds of Perry County, and is currently serving 2,502 students with 5 instructional buildings. Traversing the length of our district is a journey over 31 miles and takes nearly an hour. The most recent renovations were completed in the early 2000's but parts of many of the buildings date back to the 50's, 60's and 70's.

Our District is by far the largest employer within the District with over 325 employees. The next largest, non-agricultural, commercial or industrial operations within our area may boast 20-30 full time employees and I can think of only a few of those. The vast majorities of our income earning residents leave each morning and return each evening, working at businesses in the greater Harrisburg metropolitan area. Agricultural is our major industry within the District. This year we are looking at a \$3M budget deficit after raising taxes to the Act 1 index, next year we are planning to file for exceptions to Act 1.

West Perry's wealth is not financial. Last year while pursuing a new Superintendent, the Board was asked what was so great about West Perry, all agreed with the response. Our greatest asset is our community, staff and our students, attend a graduation ceremony at our high school and you will see community members who never had students, parents whose children graduated years ago, and parents of elementary students. We have a strong and proud community and I speak today on their behalf.

Everyone wants lower taxes and fewer burdens, but we also realize that the things we want come with a price tag. I am here today to ask that we receive our fair share. I will do my best to keep the topic of establishing a new funding formula, but beg your indulgence as I will undoubtedly slip at times to the need for more funding in general.

Any funding formula needs to be influenced by the following factors.

- Size – Smaller districts have difficulty seeing the statistical anomaly of the “average student”
 - Small student populations can make a big impact, can be difficult to predict, and Special Education Funding does not cover all costs associated with service
 - ELL – we pay a disproportionately high cost due to the few and varying students served
 - Highly Specialized Education – Out of District placements at a higher cost, due to high overhead costs, specialized training and low populations.
 - Drastic effects on cost/ADM by the loss or gain of a few students
- Sparsity - Despite being within an hour of the state capitol, the West Perry School District is amongst the most sparsely populated district in the State. Sparsity affects districts in multiple ways:

- Transportation – Students spend more time going to and from school. Overly long bus rides lead to fatigue and distraction before arriving at school and less time for study after school. We strive to avoid student bus rides over 1.5 hrs.
 - Special Services – Due to our size we are unable to provide certain specified services, and so we transport students to and from third party providers, some students may spend more time in transit then actually in class.
 - Difficulty in “joining forces” with neighboring districts – Distances between districts complicate attempts to cooperate and share services
- Poverty and other socio-economic factors
 - The transition of public education from educational institutions to social service providers cannot be underscored. While this situation has evolved with time, at the present is a direct function of current practice with regards to performance accountability.
 - In an effect to meet mandated performance goals districts now need to meet the social services needs of children, while this a noble pursuit, its burden should not borne upon an educational institution.
- Infrastructure Needs
 - Regardless of the funding stream, PlanCon, proposed ARCON or basic education funding, maintaining aging buildings is expensive
 - The recent absence of this funding and current underfunding must be addressed
- Charter Schools
 - Public schools should not be burden with funding these endeavors. These schools draw select students, and unbalance the student population.
 - Many show few differences from private schools and should be treated as such
 - Charter schools should be accountable to the same standards and same burdens as public schools
- Hold Harmless
 - Inadequate funding cannot be exacerbated by formula changes

We ask that the factors are considered in the Commission’s report, and welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Charles Thiemann, President
West Perry School District