



**Daniel J. Bell, Ed.D., Superintendent**

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#### Basic Education Funding Commission Testimony

Good Morning. My name is Daniel Bell and I serve as the Superintendent of the Hermitage School District. I have been a school administrator for 16 years with nine of those as a superintendent. I would like to thank Representative Mark Longiotti for the invitation to attend the hearing today and the Commission for their willingness to hear our thoughts and concerns.

Hermitage is a city of 16,000 residents 20 miles south of our current location. Our School District serves 2,100 students K-12 with a wide socio-economic range. Fiscally, Hermitage is very conservative with total 2012-13 expenditures of \$12,261 per student. The 2012-13 Pennsylvania Department of Education Annual Financial Report numbers show that our total per-pupil expenditures are 413th out of 500 districts. 412 School Districts spend more per student than we do. Academically, based on the District School Performance Profile, we are ranked 95th of 500 districts. We are not satisfied with this ranking and are working daily to build upon current academic success.

My first concern that has brought me here today is the overall level of funding of public education by the Commonwealth. I am certain that you have heard this statistic numerous times before but it bears repeating. Pennsylvania ranks 47<sup>th</sup> of the 50 United States in the level of state funding for public education.....47 out of 50. The Pennsylvania Department of Education assigns each school in our state letter grades for performance in numerous areas including fiscal responsibility. I do not think there can be any doubt what the assigned grade would be for the entity that scored 47<sup>th</sup> out of 50. The Commonwealth pays for 34 cents of each dollar spent on education. The national average is 44. This lack of state funding support has caused our district to make numerous reductions in staff and to raise local millage. If our great state would make the commitment to get just to the national average, a large portion of the need for us to be meeting today would be resolved.

I would like to share changes in district funding from the state over the past five years.

Basic Education Funding including State Fiscal Stabilization Fund

2009-10	\$5,824,572	
2014-15	\$5,672,875	Five Year Decrease of \$151,674

Special Education Funding

2009-10	\$1,101,126	
2014-15	\$1,112,650	Five Year Increase of \$11,524

Transportation Subsidy

2009-10	\$520,672	
2014-15	\$488,262	Five Year Decrease of \$32,410

As you can see, the Commonwealth Funding for our district has been stagnant or even reduced over the past five years. Commonwealth funding represents 37% of our total district revenue. When this is combined with steep increases in PSERS contributions, Health Benefit cost increases, and modest inflation of wages and other expenditures, we are in a difficult situation that replays itself yearly during budget time in our district.

Our District has responded to these fiscal challenges by executing the following strategies. We have cut 14 teaching positions, 2 Administrators, 10 Instructional Aides, 3 Nurse Aides and 4 Secretarial positions, as well as numerous athletic coaching positions. All district employees took a voluntary pay freeze. We have also cut the number of bus runs and while we have "trimmed" every part of the budget, we have not yet had to cut any program from our district. Fiscally, we are very near the time when we will either need to raise millage significantly or make cuts in critical parts of our educational program. I do not see either of these, raising millage or making program cuts, as particularly good solutions.

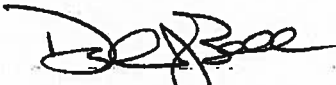
**Recommendations:**

We are asking you to support a revenue strategy that levels out the fiscal responsibility of public education. The Commonwealth should recognize the need to raise the support level to 50%, accomplished during the 1970's, or at a minimum the national average of 44%. The current level of state funding is not supportive of our public education system. To maintain this anemic level of funding will continue to place pressure on local millage across the state. We have experienced five years of trimming the budget and reducing staff. Without a viable state fiscal plan for the future, we are burdened with only two options, cutting student programs and/or raising real estate millage.

On the issue of a "fair" funding formula.....fairness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. My recommendation to the committee is to go back to the Costing Out Study that was directed by the General Assembly, commissioned by the State Board of Education, and released as part of the Governor's Budget in 2008. We find that the Study's use of base cost per modified average daily membership adjusted for factors such as poverty, English Language Learners, size and geographic cost adequately addresses the requirements of a "fair" funding formula. We believe that the study findings were equitable, adequate, complete and that now is the time to implement the plan.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today. You have a difficult and complicated task before you and the Hermitage School District wishes you much success on a determination and implementation of our road forward. The youth of our city are our greatest resource and they are counting on you.

Daniel Bell



Superintendent

