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**Duquesne Schools: More Money is not the Solution**

Advocates of the notion that more money for schools automatically translates into better education are resorting to quoting the Pennsylvania Constitution as proof that not enough is being spent. To wit: “(the) General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the commonwealth.” They obviously interpret “thorough and efficient” to mean that as long as academic achievement is dismal, spend more money and when that doesn’t work, spend more.

A series of local newspaper editorials purport to show that the state has failed the Duquesne School District by not giving them enough money to overcome the district’s hard pressed economy. But the claim is simply an assertion and is not consistent with the facts. Granted, the state’s formula for funding education is complex, but it is decidedly tilted toward providing adequate assistance to poor districts—not the impression the education apologists are attempting to have people believe.

Recent numbers show that Duquesne’s operating expenditures per student rank in the 97th percentile among school districts in the state, i.e., in the very highest levels in the state. State and federal taxpayers have been funding two-thirds of the total per pupil expenditures. For the current school year, the state has provided yet more money—an extra \$3.5 million, boosting per pupil spending above \$20,000, and raising the share of non-local funding to 73 percent.

By comparison, the “rich”, high achieving districts of Upper St. Clair and Mt. Lebanon each receive less than 20 percent of their per pupil expenditures from state and federal taxpayers. Moreover, these districts spend thousands less per pupil on operating expenditures than Duquesne. So, the question should be, “What are state and federal taxpayers receiving for all of the money going to Duquesne?” Sadly, the return is very little. Duquesne has for some time been one of the very worst academically performing districts in the state. Further, the district has been under state oversight for years—with no improvement to show for it.

If money was the path to achievement, students at Duquesne should rank among the state’s best scholars. Of course money is not the problem. The real problem is the complete unwillingness of the state to mandate any substantive reform that would

threaten the interest groups who have created the situation. These include the state's education establishment, teachers' unions, and education experts who have undoubtedly tried every academic gimmick the state oversight panel is willing to experiment with.

State taxpayers deserve better than being forced to be complicit in this abject failure of a school system. It would be far better to shut the district down and give the parents \$10,000 per child per year to get them educated where they see fit. At this level of voucher, there will be no shortage of opportunities available. Certainly, given the current deplorable level of educational attainment in the district, students could easily be better off and taxpayers would save a lot of money. But what we will see instead is more tax dollars spent to appease the groups who have demonstrated a complete inability and unwillingness to fix the problems.

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**Jake Haulk, Ph.D. President**

**Frank Gamrat, Ph.D., Sr. Research Associate**

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Please join us for a conference on *Improving The Western Pennsylvania Economy* on Thursday September 28th. Panel discussions will address the problems of the state's pro-union laws, tax problems faced by Pennsylvania's business, and how business leaders can help advance important initiatives. Speakers will include Pat Toomey from the Club for Growth, national public sector union expert David Denholm, and Jim Roddey, the first elected Chief Executive of Allegheny County. The conference will be held at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association in Oakland from 8:30AM to 12:30PM. For more information please contact us at 412.440.0079.

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