

VERDICT: INADEQUATE AND UNEQUAL A MONUMENTAL VICTORY FOR PA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Last week, the Commonwealth Court issued a ruling in the historic school funding lawsuit, and the nearly 800-page decision is a monumental victory for the plaintiffs who argued that the system of funding public schools in the state is inadequate and unequal.

THE DETAILED ANALYSIS CONTAINED IN THE DECISION WAS UNAMBIGUOUS:

- The court recognized that **education is a fundamental right** guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Constitution to all children.
- The court decision recognized what educators know: **all children can learn and succeed when given the tools.**
- The court recognized that **students in low-wealth districts are currently denied that right** because their districts cannot raise sufficient local resources, and the funding system discriminates against these communities in violation of their right to equal protection under the law.
- The court recognized that **our schools require additional state funding to meet our constitution's mandate** – a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary public education that gives every child a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically.

THE QUESTION NOW IS HOW THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WILL RESPOND.

This ruling is a clear repudiation of a bare-bones system of public education that opponents of this lawsuit defended in court during the trial. Now, as ordered by the court, the state legislature has no choice but to fix the state's broken, unjust funding system. It is no longer just a moral failing of the state legislature if they continue to underfund Pennsylvania's public schools; it is now certified as a legal failing. The legislature must now take the necessary steps to ensure that every child has access to the education that the Pennsylvania Constitution entitles them to. Our governor can point the way by proposing a significant down payment to address the problem in his forthcoming budget address.

Importantly, school privatization advocates attempted to appropriate the decision to push a "school choice" agenda. The truth is, not only is there no mention of school choice in the 786-page decision, but an expansion of vouchers that moves money out of the public schools – the very schools that the decision identifies as already under-resourced – will exacerbate the problem. The constitutional mandate is to provide a thorough and efficient public school system so that kids can have the resources needed to succeed in the public schools that exist in districts where they already live. That is the directive of our state government, and now they must act.

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