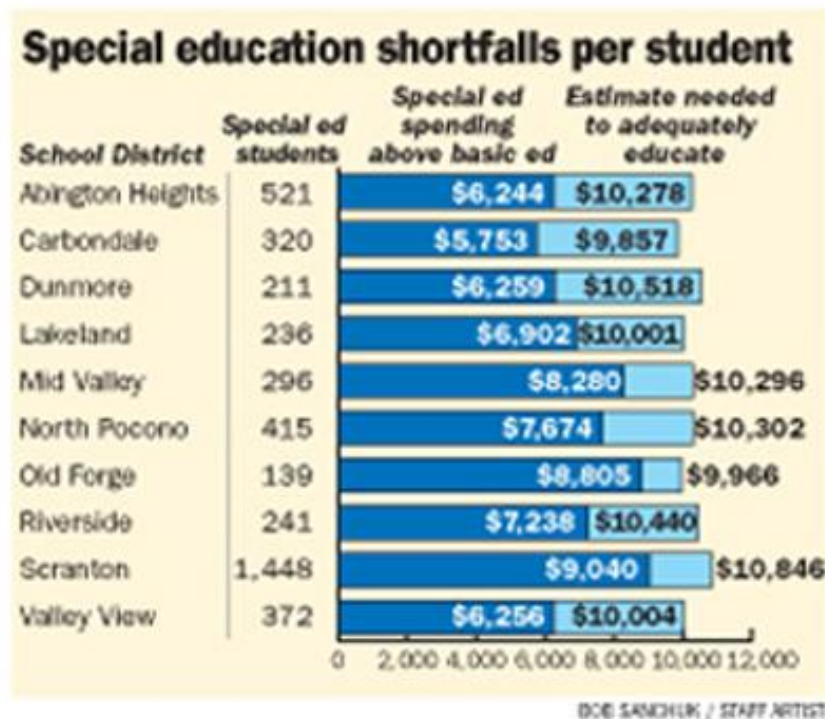


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**Study finds NEPA schools short of special-ed funds.
Area school districts need to spend an additional \$18 million on special education to provide students with adequate resources for a quality education, according to a study released this week.**

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Area school districts need to spend an additional \$18 million on special education to provide students with adequate resources for a quality education, according to a study released this week.

Only seven of the 37 school districts in Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming counties spent enough to meet their targets, according to the study, Costing-Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Education Goals for Students with Disabilities.

The study, which used 2006-07 funding totals, was based on the state's 2007 costing-out study, which examined adequate-funding shortfalls in school districts and was the basis for the state's

new funding formula.

Statewide, the total funding gap for special education is \$380 million, with an average shortfall of \$1,947 based on the 194,862 students who attend school districts with a funding gap. The study looked at the additional amount needed to educate a special-needs student, using a base cost of \$8,119 to educate a student with no special needs.

The release of the study coincided with the release of Gov. Ed Rendell's 2009-10 budget proposal. The governor's budget calls for a \$300 million increase to basic education funding, but no increases are included for special education.

Area superintendents said they do as much as they can with the funding they receive.

The Scranton School District needs to spend \$1,806 more per special-education student, according to the study.

"The cost of educating special-needs students continues to rise on an annual basis," Acting Superintendent William King said. "It's difficult to meet the needs of the students when the funds do not match what the need is."

Michael Mahon, Ph.D., Abington Heights superintendent, said the district's \$4,034 shortfall does not match what the district offers.

"We work very hard to provide it at an appropriate cost," Dr. Mahon said.

Unlike the 2007 costing-out study that was commissioned by the Legislature, the state did not have a direct role with this study.

Leah Harris, a spokeswoman for the Department of Education, said she has not reviewed the study. In regards to funding for 2009-10, the state expects President Barack Obama's proposed economic stimulus package to include funding for special education, she said.

The report was researched and written by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates of Denver, and was funded by the Education Law Center, Disability Rights Network and the Arc of Pennsylvania.

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