

## News

### Study: Two local schools short on special ed funding

***Two local school districts need to spend more money on special education services to provide students with adequate resources for a quality education, according to a recently released study.***

**BY SAM GALSKI  
STAFF WRITER**

Published: Monday, February 23, 2009 4:15 AM EST

Two local school districts need to spend more money on special education services to provide students with adequate resources for a quality education, according to a recently released study.

The study, Costing-Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Education Goals for Students with Disabilities, focuses on special education spending in Pennsylvania school districts and is a revised version of a costing-out study commissioned by the Legislature in 2007.

Findings were based on 2006-07 allocations and, like the state's initial costing-out analysis, the study examined adequate funding shortfalls in school districts. Funding shortfalls were identified in both the Weatherly Area and Tamaqua Area districts.

The state did not have a direct role in the revised study. The latest version — funded by the Education Law Center, Disability Rights Network and the Arc of Pennsylvania — was released when Gov. Ed Rendell presented his 2009-2010 state budget proposal.

The study identifies a \$380 million statewide gap in funding for special education and found that 391 of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts have inadequate funding for special education programs, according to the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania.

It examines the additional amount of money each district needs to educate a special needs student, using a base cost of \$8,119 for educating a student with no special needs.

A formula used to weigh the increased cost of educating a special education student compared to those enrolled in regular education programs was used to identify an average per-pupil special education funding shortfall of \$1,947, the Disability Rights Network reported.

The study reports special education student counts from 2006-2007 for each school district and compares actual program spending with the costing-out estimate.

The Weatherly Area and Tamaqua Area school districts are well within the average shortfall of \$1,947, while Hazleton Area spent \$4,733 more in 2006-07 on programs than what the costing-out estimate recommends.

Hazleton Area spent an average of \$14,625 on each of its 1,107 students in 2006-07, the study states. The costing-out report says the district should be spending at least \$9,892 per student.

The report said Weatherly Area should be spending \$713 more on each special education student, while Tamaqua Area had a funding gap of \$286.

Weatherly Area spent \$9,899 on each of its 133 special education students in 2006-07, while Tamaqua Area spent \$9,459 on each of its 411 students, the study says.

Weatherly Area Superintendent Frank Victor said the funding gap exists because his district has a small special education population. Weatherly Area relies on Carbon Lehigh Intermediate

Unit for most of its special education services, with the district offering fewer in-house programs, he said.

"We only have a few students," he said. "When you're having all of these classes for emotional support, autism and different exceptionalities it is expensive to operate. In our case you have more of a shared-services type of arrangement. You don't have all of those expenses in operating a classroom."

Although he didn't personally review the study, Hazleton Area Special Education Director Carl Manfredi said remedial programs and in-house programming are most likely to credit for not having a funding gap.

"One of the things we do well is we don't over-identify our population," he said. "We do a good job of trying to remediate our students before placing them in our programs."

Per-pupil expenses are most likely higher for Hazleton Area schools because the district educates most of its students through in-house programs, he said.

"We looked at our expenses for the last three years and I've done some comparisons with schools in Berks County," he said. "Some of my colleagues out there said we're (financially) pretty comparable."

The complete costing-out study is available at <http://drnpa.org/alerts/id/584>.

[sgalski@standardspeaker.com](mailto:sgalski@standardspeaker.com)