

THE YORK DISPATCH

Special ed bill could boost funds for York City schools

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Special education state funding could move to a per-student-based formula instead of a flat percentage if a proposed bill by state lawmakers is adopted.

The bill, already approved by the state House Appropriations Committee, would be a financial boon for school districts that have many more special education students than the state guideline set in the current funding formula. School districts are required to provide special education services, whether in the school or by sending the student to an outside provider, regardless of cost.

School districts have been getting special education funding based on the assumption that each district has 16 percent of its total enrollment in special education.

Accurate count: Under the bill, school districts would instead be funded based on the number of special education students they have. The new formula would more closely resemble the way basic education funding is calculated; special education funding is in addition to basic education funding.

"It's an important way of completing the school funding formula," said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania, an educational advocacy group. "It's a really good step forward."

For a district like York City, which usually has closer to 25 percent or more of its students in special education, that means much more funding.

"It should be based on what you have rather than just a guess," said state Rep. Eugene DePasquale, D-York City, who is a member
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of the appropriations committee.

Costs: City schools business manager Jon Boyer said the district expects to get about \$5.2 million from the state in the 2010-11 budget year for special education, using the 16 percent formula. But that covers just a portion of the costs, he said, as salaries and benefits alone for special education staff total \$11 million.

"The state isn't providing equitable funding," Boyer said.

DePasquale added, though, that "there will be some winners in this and some losers in this," as districts that have less than 16 percent in special education wouldn't continue to get overpaid.

State Rep. Will Tallman, R-Reading Township, who represents parts of Adams and York counties, said he supports the change but also is worried the bill as currently proposed would increase state control of special education, with more stipulations.

"It's telling you how to spend the money," Tallman said.

The bill is expected to go up for a vote by the full House in coming days.