



RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Philip Martell, Superintendent of Schools



February 5, 2025

A Broken System: The Case Against Governor Shapiro's Budget

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Governor Josh Shapiro's proposed education budget fails to address the deep, systemic inequities that have long plagued Pennsylvania's schools. Instead of enacting meaningful reform, his plan merely funnels more taxpayer dollars into failing and underperforming districts, perpetuating a broken system that continues to leave countless students behind. This is not progress—it is an expensive Band-Aid on a system desperately needing transformation.

Pennsylvania's education funding model remains deeply flawed. It disproportionately allocates resources in ways that fail to yield positive results. Simply increasing funding for underperforming schools without addressing the root causes of failure will not lead to meaningful improvement. We need a comprehensive overhaul—one that prioritizes efficiency, accountability, and, above all, student success. The current system fails students and taxpayers, with money often wasted on administrative costs and mismanaged policies instead of benefiting the classroom experience.

The Need for School Choice

One of the most pressing solutions is expanding school choice. Families should not be forced to send their children to failing schools simply because of their zip code. Every child deserves access to a high-quality education, regardless of their location. By allowing parents to choose the best educational environment for their children—whether it be public, private, charter, or homeschool—we can foster competition that drives overall improvement.

Additionally, school choice empowers parents to have a greater role in shaping their children's futures. Too often, families in underperforming districts feel trapped by a system that does not serve their needs. A competitive education marketplace would allow parents to seek better opportunities, forcing schools to improve their standards or risk losing students. True education reform must center around choice, ensuring every family can access a school that meets their child's unique needs and abilities.

The Case for District Consolidation

Pennsylvania's outdated education model is riddled with inefficiencies. With over 500 school districts statewide, administrative overhead consumes critical resources that should be directed into classrooms. Consolidating districts would reduce waste, cut unnecessary bureaucracy, and ensure funds are used where they matter most—supporting students and educators. Instead of perpetuating a fragmented and inefficient system, we should take bold steps to streamline operations and maximize resources.

Reducing the number of school districts would also promote educational equity. In wealthier districts, students often access better resources, facilities, and instructional staff, while poorer districts struggle to provide even the most basic services. Consolidation could lead to a more balanced allocation of funds, helping to ensure that every student in Pennsylvania receives the same level of educational opportunity. In the long run, a more efficient model would mean better teacher pay, improved infrastructure, and expanded academic programs that benefit all students.

The Broken American Education Model

The American education model is failing; continuing to throw money at a broken system will not fix it. We must adopt a transformative approach that prioritizes student outcomes over bureaucratic expansion. Across the nation, many school districts operate under outdated policies that do not reflect the needs of modern learners. Schools must be able to adapt to evolving industries, technological advancements, and diverse student populations. By implementing reforms such as merit-based teacher compensation, modernizing curriculum standards, and integrating practical career-readiness programs, we can create a system that prepares students for success beyond the classroom.

Moreover, accountability must be a cornerstone of any education system. Too often, schools receive increased funding without clear benchmarks for improvement. If taxpayers are expected to invest more money in public education, they deserve transparency and results. School leaders should be held accountable for academic progress, and underperforming schools should face real consequences rather than receiving continuous bailouts.

A Call for True Reform

Governor Shapiro's budget is not the solution we need. It is time to stop enabling failure and start building a system that empowers families, strengthens schools, and puts students first. The focus must shift from maintaining an inefficient status quo to implementing bold, structural changes prioritizing students over special interests.

We must create an education system that values outcomes over funding increases, fostering innovation instead of complacency. By embracing school choice, consolidating inefficient districts, demanding measurable accountability, and modernizing our outdated education model, Pennsylvania can lead the way in transforming education for future generations.

The time for half-measures and misplaced spending priorities has passed. It is time for real, impactful change that prioritizes students' needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Martell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mr. Philip Martell

Superintendent of Schools
River Valley School District