

Mt. Lebanon School District

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Director of Business

October 1st Special Education Funding Commission Hearing

Good afternoon. I want to thank the Commission members for allowing me to present on behalf of the Mt. Lebanon School District today. I am very pleased with your interest in how the new special education funding formula has impacted our District and how special education costs and services are trending. Though we have seen increases in our subsidy, it is not keeping pace with our mandated expenditures.

Revenue

As it is presently designed the new funding formula has been beneficial to our District. Our funding has increased an average of 1.98% per year over the last five years. In contrast, the previous five years saw only a 0.10% increase. As costs continue to rise it is necessary that our subsidies keep pace and this new formula has proven successful.

Expenditures

Increasing enrollment and mandated costs continue to escalate expenditures. While the new formula did provide relief, the expenditures have more than doubled in relation to new revenue stream, increasing on a five year average of 4.33% a year. These increases can be attributed to many things, but in Mt. Lebanon the majority of the growth is attributed to the number of identified students and new mandates.

Enrollment

Our total District enrollment has increased on average 1% a year. Our identified special education students have grown on average 3.14% per year. That means that while our enrollment has increased, 35.19% of those new students are identified special education students. Increasing enrollment means additional staff both professional and support and similar to all schools in the Commonwealth, our employees are the biggest cost driver.

Budget

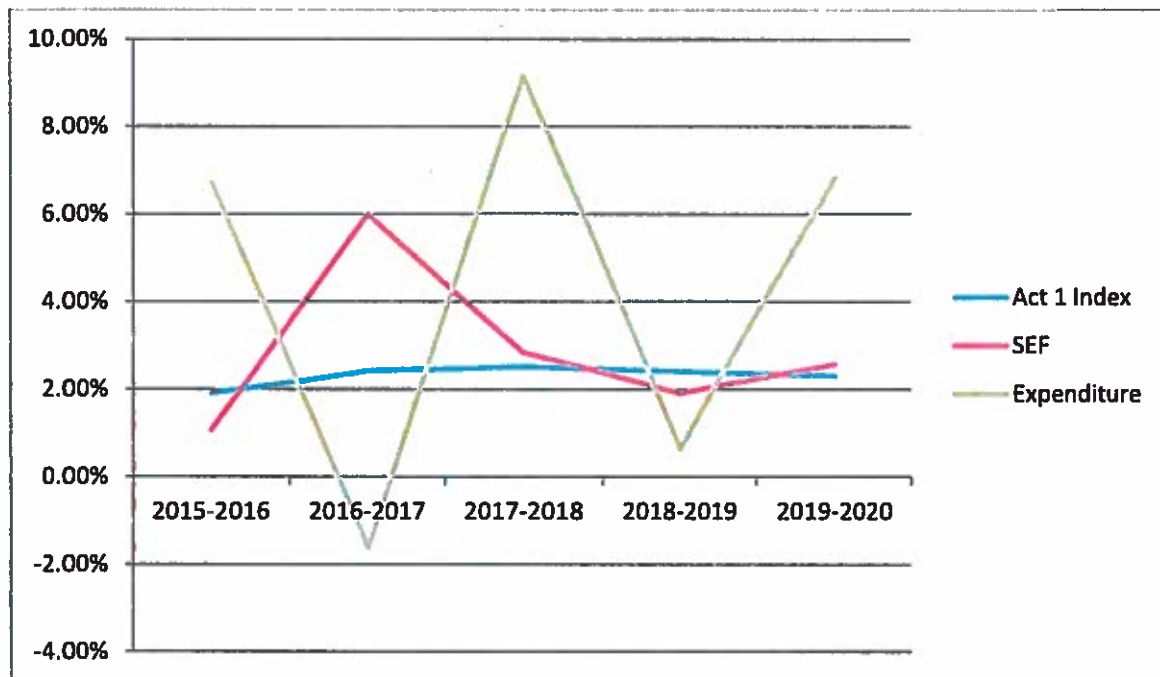
The 2019-2020 Mt. Lebanon School District budget is in excess of \$102.6M. Of this amount, \$9.76M or 9.51% of the budget is dedicated to special education students, while the District special education enrollment totals almost 12% of the student population. The special education expenditure of \$9.76M is offset by special education funding of \$2.88M, meaning our programs are state funded at 29.52% in the current budget. In comparison, ten years ago the state funded our special education programs at 38.34%.

Cost Savings

At Mt. Lebanon we have implemented many cost saving measures to our special education programs. We have three Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) classrooms. These classrooms are for our life skills students who would have typically been sent to outside placements. We have also increased school based social work services in-house. These additional services allow us to identify students early to better treat them and before they require more costly interventions. We have also established Student Assistant Program (SAP) teams at every building. The goal of these teams is to identify and refer students to the correct support groups or agencies. Our goal is to use early intervention to help identify mental health issues or substance abuse to better serve our children and before they become more costly. We have also created emotional support classrooms in our two Middle Schools to address issues that could result in students being outplaced in High School. Lastly, we join with other local Districts to share in the cost of transporting students to the same outside placements.

Trends

The upward trends and unknowns in special education costs and special education enrollments continue to present budgeting difficulties. The number of identified students continues to require additional staff, outside placements, and transportation. Students are participating in more therapies and support services than ever before. Mandated staff training is becoming more costly and frequent as well. In an Act 1 environment, Districts will need additional State assistance to service these students with exceptionalities.



Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic. I appreciate the work the Commission is doing to make special education funding equitable across the Commonwealth. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.