



State Representative **JESSE TOPPER**



Proudly Serving the 78th District

Increased Learning Flexibility Now Law

A new law I sponsored is on the books and gives Pennsylvania schools more flexibility when it comes to providing educational opportunities to students.

Act 56 of 2023 changes the academic year instructional time requirement from just 180 days to either 180 days or 990 secondary and 900 elementary hours.

Giving schools more options to tabulate instructional time provides educators and administrators a better opportunity to meet the needs of students. This legislation was developed in consultation with the Superintendent's Association and will lead to more participation in internships and extended career and technology hours, allowing for increased individualized educational opportunities, student support and more focused workforce development.

The previous law required schools to provide 180 days of instruction per school year. However, a school board was permitted to request a school week be comprised of 27.5 hours as the equivalent for five school days. Additionally, the secretary of Education could have approved, upon request, a school term containing a minimum of 990 secondary or 900 elementary hours of instruction as the equivalent of 180 school days.

Act 56 removes the approval process and automatically sets the standard of 180 days or 990 secondary and 900 elementary hours per year.



GOP Unites Behind Alternative Basic Education Funding Report

Presented with an opportunity to make transformational changes to the Commonwealth's education system, the Basic Education Funding Commission recently produced two reports. The majority report did not take into account the fiscal realities across Pennsylvania. As a member of the commission, I voted against the majority report, as did six other members, including a Democrat senator, in an 8-7 vote.

As an alternative, Republicans issued a report that recommends reforms to the state's Basic Education Funding Formula in response to a Commonwealth Court ruling that declared the method in which we fund our school unconstitutional.

Our report recommended greater stability and predictability for school funding, a key theme during the commission's hearings. Additionally, the report requests none of the state's 500 public school districts lose funding based on historic allocations received in the most recently completed state budget. It recommends averaging poverty metrics over a three-year span to avoid drastic budgetary impacts based on small population changes in school districts, which will provide greater predictability for school budgeting officials.

We recognize the need for change in the way education is funded and, through our report, are making recommendations that address the funding formula. Our report received six votes in favor and six votes against, with all three members of the governor's administration abstaining. Since it was a tie vote, the report was not approved.

Our report does not recommend spending amounts, unlike the

Democrats' report, as Republican commission members caution the impact of forecasted budget shortfalls on current spending levels could warrant tax increases on hard-working Pennsylvanians. They agree those decisions should be left up to the annual appropriations process, which includes the governor and all legislators. It also highlights efforts as recent as last month to address school infrastructure challenges with a focus on maintenance programs.

We recognize the need for change in the way education is funded and, through our report, are making recommendations that address the funding formula. What we are not willing to do is to step outside of our mission as a commission and recommend a specific monetary number. That is the purview of the General Assembly and the administration.

The commission heard testimony addressing several concerns surrounding education. In response, we created a report that provides a balance of improvements and accountability measures to ensure tax dollars are being spent in a manner that produces results.

Based on support by Gov. Josh Shapiro, our report recommends assisting students who are trapped in schools in crisis with options to pursue educational achievement and opportunities.

Determining the formula that drives out tax dollars to districts was the top priority of the commission and we have made our recommendations. We were able to reach consensus on some items and there are areas of disagreement. It's now time for the General Assembly to take action on all of these issues.



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Let's Stay in Touch!

There are numerous ways for us to stay connected about all the news coming out of Harrisburg.

I send email updates about important legislation, events in the district and other information you will find helpful.

It's simple to receive these updates by signing up at **RepTopper.com**.

I also post updates to social media platforms. **Find me at facebook.com/RepTopper and instagram.com/RepTopper.**

AROUND THE DISTRICT AND BEYOND



As a member of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) Oversight Committee, I met with colleagues and PIAA officials to receive and review the annual report. The committee oversees issues involving sports and athletic competitions sanctioned by the PIAA.



Sen. Pat Stefano (R-Bedford/Fayette/Somerset/Westmoreland) and I had a great turnout for the Senior Expo we hosted at the Bedford Fairgrounds. This was a great opportunity for attendees to gather information about services available to older Pennsylvanians.



I had a blast playing the piano and leading a group of residents of Colonial Courtyard in some Christmas carols to usher in the holidays.



ON THE AIR!

Did you know you can stay up to date on what's happening in Harrisburg through the Generally Assembled podcast? In each episode, House Spokesman Jason Gottesman and I break down the issues. You can listen to all episodes by going to **pahousegop.com/mypodcasts**.



I had a blast hosting the state champion Everett Area Middle/High School softball team at the Capitol! These young ladies had a great season capped off by bringing home the state championship. I, and the community, are very proud of these great athletes.



It was great celebrating recent improvements at the Bedford County Airport thanks to grants totaling \$750,000, with another \$1 million-plus investment coming soon. The Bedford County Airport Authority is working hard on creating a safer, pilot-friendly facility.



As Republican chairman of the House Education Committee, I attended an informational hearing at Shippensburg University on dual enrollment and higher education affordability. As part of the hearing, I toured the campus to learn how the school is better preparing students for the workforce.