**Condensed ELC-PILC Talking Points – October 2021**

**Argument in a nutshell (from the video)**

All children in PA have the right to a high-quality public education. This isn’t just an opinion – it’s the law, written into the state constitution in the 1870s.

But in PA, not every child gets the resources they need. By failing to provide enough state funding, our leaders in Harrisburg have created a school funding system where the students who need the most get the least, simply because of where they live.

Our leaders are severely shortchanging students in low-wealth school districts across the state, including where most of our Black and Brown students live. This isn’t a few schools falling through the cracks. It is most schools.

It’s wrong, it’s unconstitutional and our leaders in Harrisburg are responsible. That’s why we’ve taken the state to court.

**The problem**

In PA, underfunded districts are rural, urban, and suburban, and they are in all corners of the Commonwealth. This affects most of the state’s children: Most Pennsylvania schools are underfunded.

The low share of funding from the state is the cause of inequality and deprivation in schools across PA.

**State underfunding of schools means overreliance on local wealth, which creates our unequal status quo**.

**Hundreds of thousands of students are going without the basics and without the things they need to reach their potential**. The next potential vaccine inventor could be attending school in Pennsylvania right now but won’t get to pursue a career in medical research if there are no science labs in their school.

**Right now in Pennsylvania, local wealth determines whether or not students get what they need**: The quality and experience level of teachers; the number of counselors, nurses, librarians, and reading specialists; computers and STEM labs; art and music; smaller class sizes and extra help for students who are struggling to learn.

Black and Latinx students are concentrated in PA’s low-wealth schools, and they are being shortchanged. They get dramatically fewer resources because of where they live and less exposure to rigorous coursework. These result in lower graduation rates and fewer students earning college degrees.

**Generations of Black and Brown students have attended underfunded schools and been deprived of educational opportunities**, narrowing and limiting their futures. This two-tiered system is unacceptable.

**Our solution**

**Money matters:** We can see that differences in resources make a big difference in education outcomes. Kids who are experiencing poverty but attend well-resourced schools do well!

**There is no way to solve this problem with the level of funding we have now. It is not enough to just distribute the current state funding more fairly**. Our state’s fair funding formula is only as good as the money we put through it, and right now, running all current state funding through the formula would leave many districts far short of their needs. We can’t just split the pie differently. We’d be fighting over crumbs. We must grow the pie. To achieve equity, we must have an adequate level of funding.

**We need substantial, recurring increases of state funding** so that every student can receive that quality public education, whether or not they live in a wealthy community that is able to raise the needed funds with local taxes.

**Our vision**

There is vast unrealized potential of students in the state’s most underfunded districts.

All students in Pennsylvania should have meaningful opportunities to learn and thrive, just like students in well-funded districts have now.

Pennsylvania is not a poor state. We can fix this. We have the resources to ensure that every child gets a high-quality education that allows them to achieve their potential.

We also know what successful schools look like and their necessary ingredients. We have plenty of examples in well-funded school districts.

**Why a lawsuit?**

State officials in Harrisburg have direct responsibility for the underfunding of PA schools and for the conditions in our schools that causes, including the unconscionable inequality in PA public schools.

It is the legislature’s constitutional duty to fix the funding system. They can address this funding problem, only the legislature can fix it, and inequality will continue to grow unless they do.

The lawsuit is our tool to shift the paradigm: to get the state legislature to finally meet their constitutional obligations. An order from the court to create a new funding system will mean the legislature won’t be able to ignore the urgent needs of students and schools any longer.

From other states, we have seen what lawsuits can accomplish: that funding lawsuits generate more revenue for schools, improved student achievement and better life outcomes for students.