

Panel to study formula for distribution of SEEK funding

GOAL IS A REPORT BEFORE 2015 SESSION

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The General Assembly is convening a study to determine whether Kentucky's children are well-served by the formula used to determine funding for K-12 public schools.

Senate Education Committee Chairman Mike Wilson, R-Bowling Green, announced the study last week in a Senate floor speech. An interim subcommittee will analyze the SEEK (Support Education Excellence in Kentucky) formula used to allocate state dollars to school districts. Gov. Steve Beshear has proposed in his budget an increase of SEEK funding and both chambers are largely agreeing with that.

Wilson said he and House Education Committee Chairman Derrick Graham, D-Frankfort, will co-chair the panel.

Kentucky Department of Education spokeswoman Nancy Rodriguez said the de-

partment supports the General Assembly undertaking the study, and looks forward to reviewing the findings.

"The purpose of this subcommittee is simple," Wilson said in his Senate floor speech. "It's been 24 years since the passage of KERA (Kentucky Education Reform Act). And Kentucky has changed in those 24 years, and education has changed in those years as well. And certainly it's time for us as educational leaders to examine the SEEK formula."

The lawmaker said the subcommittee would hear from experts, advocates, stakeholders and citizens on how the SEEK formula works and how it can be improved.

Wilson said he hoped the subcommittee could issue a

report on the status of the SEEK formula and any needed changes to the joint interim House and Senate Education committee by December 2014, before the start of the Jan. 2015 session of the General Assembly. He said the committee would attempt to answer some critical questions about the formula.

"Are our schools and districts getting the tools they need to educate our future workforce? Are our communities being treated fairly? Is it equitable? Is it adequate?" Wilson said.

Under SEEK, the state sets a guaranteed allotment for each student, taking into consideration additional needs for exceptionally disadvantaged, economically disadvantaged students, transportation, students who do not speak English, and students served in home and hospital settings, according to the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence website.

The base SEEK per pupil allotment varies depending on district needs. The

amount provided by the state fluctuates depending on districts' ability to generate revenue to meet the guaranteed amount. Wealthier districts receive less funding per student than poorer districts. The base guarantee per pupil amount is established by the state budget every two years. Districts are guaranteed this amount, plus adjustments.

Local districts pay part of the SEEK guaranteed amount by raising no less than 30 cents per \$100 assessed property evaluation or its equivalent. The state adds the amount needed to reach the full guarantee.

The General Assembly study would begin in June following the completion of a school financing study being conducted by consultants for the Council for Better Education, a coalition of most of the state's school districts.

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