

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Tennessean**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

< < Back

## The jury is still out on the BEP formula

By REP. GARY ODOM



Rep. Gary Odom

Published: Tuesday, 01/02/07

The Basic Education Program, BEP, is a funding formula established in 1992 for our public schools. The formula came into existence as a result of a lawsuit won by 77 rural school districts. The rural schools argued successfully in the courts that, because of their smaller tax bases, a more equitable system of funding needed to be established to equalize K-12 education.

Rural schools saw the changes in K-12 funding as simply an issue of fairness while some in urban school districts referred to the BEP as a "Robin Hood" approach; that is, "taking from the rich to give to the poor."

Having received the first 12 years of my public education in a poor and rural school district in this state, I support efforts to ensure that our funding policies do not

shortchange any citizen. My two children received their K-12 education through the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, so I am also familiar with the unique challenges presented to urban schools. From this background I must conclude the jury is still out on whether the BEP can ever accomplish the goals for which it was created.

### Many components to the BEP

The BEP has three major categories: instruction, classroom and non-classroom. The funding formula includes a state and local share of the BEP. There are 45 BEP components, which include enrollment, personnel allocation, unit cost adjustments, property values and sales tax revenue. There is also a provision in the formula referred to as "fiscal capacity" that measures supposed economic viability and thus the educational funding capabilities of local governments. If it sounds complicated, it is.

There are many examples of the BEP funding formula that simply appear illogical in their application. Williamson County, obviously one of the wealthiest counties in the state, receives more state education funding per pupil than Davidson County. The state funds 26.4 percent of the cost associated with a Davidson County student and 39 percent for a Williamson County student. This is difficult to justify.

### Factors are inconsistent

Another component of the BEP formula, the Cost Differential Factor, is supposedly based on a percentage of jobs that pay above a certain salary level. Strangely, this results in urban Davidson County and rural Van Buren County (as two examples) receiving additional funding while urban Hamilton County/Chattanooga schools receive nothing.

Two costly factors not addressed by the BEP are at-risk students and English Language Learners

(ELLs). More than 5,000 students in Metro Nashville Public Schools are ELLs, constituting nearly 25 percent of the state's ELLs.

Nashville also has a disproportionately large share of at-risk students. In my view, both factors need to be addressed immediately with new funding because all school systems have at-risk students and ELLs.

There are many aspects of the BEP that continue to be inconsistent and illogical. In summary, I believe a funding formula for the allocation of education dollars should be simple and fair.

Published: Tuesday, 01/02/07

---