

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman  
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With the return of state lawmakers to Columbia in the near future and with our children back in school; I am reminded of the legislative initiatives that continue to impact citizens of Beaufort County - most especially, the matter of the state's flawed and unfair funding formula for education.

The general assembly will reportedly be largely consumed with additional budget cuts and won't address the concerns of our County regarding this issue anytime soon. Difficult economic times, however, compound the oppressive burden placed on local taxpayers and, although I am sympathetic regarding the state budget crisis, I remain outraged at the unjustified inequity.

I have written and talked about this injustice for many years. But, it is important for the people of Beaufort County to know that the state's funding formula for public education cheats our schools and our taxpayers. It has eliminated state funding for public education in Beaufort County and required us to subsidize other school districts across South Carolina. We have been punished by a flawed funding formula that suggests we are wealthy even though half our school children are eligible for free and reduced lunches and the average wage in Beaufort County is below that of the state and the nation.

In addition, Act 388 eliminated resident homeowner property taxes for school operations and replaced it with a sales tax. That, combined with the current recession has resulted in further declines in revenue. It also created a rush among non-resident property owners to become resident property owners to avoid paying the school operations tax. Thus, there is even further decline in local revenue. Meanwhile, foreclosures on residential properties are at an all time high.

It is a bigger problem today than ever before with the taxpayers of Beaufort County generating \$100 million for other school districts and getting zero for public schools here at home. In past years, your County council visited Columbia on bended knees and got no response. We asked politely and got no response. We lobbied urgently - then we threatened - and still got no response. Clearly, we are outnumbered in this fight because why would state lawmakers in other areas want to change things when they can continue to take our money?

For example, Greenville, which is one of the wealthiest counties in South Carolina, received nearly \$160 million of state funding towards a budget of \$199 million in 2010, but Beaufort County got nothing.

Last year Beaufort County and the Beaufort County School District partnered to engage the McNair Law Firm to survey the legislative landscape, identify possible solutions and assist us and Beaufort legislators in making the case for change in Columbia. Thanks to those effort and the leadership of Senator Davis – state education funding inequities are a front burner item in the Senate and, hopefully, ripe for change. We are currently discussing continuing the engagement of the McNair firm through the coming legislative session. The significance

of the funding inequity cannot be overstated. Please contact any legislator you know and let them know Beaufort County schools deserve a fair share of state education funding.