

Last week I shared a history of school funding in Pennsylvania. This week, I'd like to continue the discussion on school funding as it will be a hot topic in Harrisburg in the weeks to come.

Right now, we are being subjected to gubernatorial campaign ads regarding cuts to education made by Governor Corbett. Corbett's campaign calls Wolf a liar for saying he cut 1 billion dollars from education. As voters, we can believe one of four things:

1. Corbett is lying and Wolf is telling the truth.
2. Wolf is lying and Corbett is telling the truth.
3. They are both lying.
4. They are both telling the truth.

Have you selected which statement you believe? If you answered #1, you are correct. If you answered #2, you are correct. As a matter of fact #3 and #4 can also be correct depending on how you "spin" the information. So let me try to explain it with a hypothetical.

Let's say I owe you \$7,000. We agree on a five year payment plan wherein the first year, I pay you \$1,000 and add \$200 to that payment annually. So the payment schedule looks like this:

2014	\$1,000
2015	\$1,200
2016	\$1,400
2017	\$1,600
2018	\$1,800

In year one I save from my earnings and pay you \$1,000. Before year two comes along, my mother sends me money just because she thinks I'm cute. In year two, I again take \$1,000 from my earnings but use \$200 from my mother's contribution to give you the \$1200 I owe you. In year three, Mom again sends me money just because I'm her baby and I'm spoiled. So in year three, I again take \$1000 from my earnings but use \$400 from my mother to make up the balance. In year four, Mom has really increased her gift to me so once again, I just take \$1000 from my earnings and use \$600 from Mom to make the payment.

In year five, things change. Mom decides I don't call her often enough (which is probably true) and stops sending me money. So I pay you only \$1,000 saying that's all I've really been paying and since Mom quit sending me money, I can't afford to pay you the full amount.

Did I "cut" my payment to you or do I get credit for maintaining the amount of money coming from my personal earnings? If I paid \$1100 from my earnings in year five could I say I "increased" my spending to you? One undeniable fact is that you are getting less money than you expected.

The 2011-2012 school budget was my first as superintendent so I remember it well. It was also Tom Corbett's first state budget. Beginning in 2008, Governor Rendell began using federal stimulus dollars to increase spending for education. The amount of state money from state coffers for education remained the same for three years and was supplemented by the federal dollars. When Corbett became Governor, the stimulus money was gone and he set state education spending back to the 2008 level. Essentially, he said there was no money so school districts had to "turn back the clock" three years and live with what we had received three years prior. For General McLane, that left us with a 2.2 million dollar projected deficit for 11-12.

I completely understood the Governor's position. He preached a gospel of frugality and not spending what you don't have. I knew that meant that any new programming I was considering for the district could not be funded and we had to cut everything the bare bones. I expected the same from the state and was willing to support the necessary sacrifices.

Then, two months later, the real agenda came out. The Governor was pushing a bill to provide vouchers to private schools. It was a broad proposal that would cost many millions of dollars. When the secretary of education, Ron Tomalis was asked how they could propose new spending in midst of the draconian cuts, he replied, "This is important enough. We'll find the money." It was at that point that I knew the new administration in Harrisburg was business as usual: move the money to match personal and lobby interests.

I should note than in years subsequent to 2011, the Governor did allocate money to various educational items but not to the basic education fund, which we what we use to pay the bills.

Hopefully with my example and experience, you can develop your own “spin.” There is so much more I could share but I have to go call Mom.