

from www.unionleader.com

Sen. Estabrook and Rep. Rous: Finally, NH will put our kids' educational needs first, money second

By SEN. IRIS ESTABROOK AND REP. EMMA ROUS Commentary

Friday, Jan. 26, 2007

THE MOST recent New Hampshire Supreme Court ruling on education funding directs the Legislature to define an "adequate education" in a way that allows us to identify its cost. Past practice has been to count the money the state had available and find a formula that distributed those dollars. This time we are committed to doing it differently.

Rather than running away from the court's decision, we are fully engaging in conversation about the essential opportunities our schools must provide for our students to be successful and contributing members of society. We are committed to providing an equal opportunity for an adequate education to all New Hampshire youth regardless of where they live.

Along with the court, we recognize that the cost of adequacy will not be the same in every community. Whatever we accept as our definition of adequacy, the state is constitutionally obliged to pay for. Therefore, we are aware that our definition of an adequate education must be both realistic and practical.

One thing is clear -- New Hampshire school boards and superintendents have had enough of the education funding roller coaster. Much is at stake and we will not rush into a new funding plan without careful thought and work.

We and other members of the Legislature have been gathering information about what other states have done, reviewing New Hampshire's education funding history and holding preliminary discussions with constitutional experts and leading educators. The adequacy discussion will involve parents, business leaders and educators. We will appoint a Joint Legislative Task Force on Adequacy, involving Senate and House members, to hold regional public hearings in February and March.

In addition, a number of proposals in the form of bills will have scheduled public hearings at the State House in upcoming months.

Once the July 1 deadline of defining adequacy is met, the next steps of determining the cost and developing a mechanism for funding will be taken. The court has handed us a significant but achievable task, and we believe we are on track to reach our goal and do what is best for New Hampshire's students and citizens.

Sen. Iris Estabrook, D-Durham, is chairman of the Senate Education Committee. Rep. Emma Rous, D-Durham, is chairman of the House Education Committee.