

June 27, 2024

Secretary Rick Siger
PA Department of Community & Economic Development
Commonwealth Keystone Building
400 North Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Secretary Siger:

We are writing to express our full support for the Antietam School District's applications for Public School Facility Improvement Grant Program (PSFIG) funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development's (DCED).

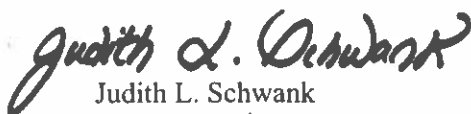
As you may know, a devastating flood hit the Antietam community on July 9, 2023. The flooding caused immense damage to the Antietam Middle-Senior High School, rendering a majority of the building uninhabitable for the 2023-2024 school year. Unfortunately, on September 26, 2023, Pennsylvania was denied a Major Disaster Declaration from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) related to the flooding that hit Berks County^[1].

Despite many challenges, the Antietam School District has worked diligently to explore options to create the best learning environment for displaced students without unduly burdening local taxpayers. Renovating the Mt. Penn Primary Center (MPPC) and renovating a portion of the middle-senior high school that is outside of the floodplain into a building for K-3 students is the course of action Antietam is pursuing. However, grant funding is needed to support these crucial renovations and ensure students have a safe and suitable learning environment.

The PSFIG provides us with a unique opportunity to financially support a school district in the midst of a genuine crisis. With grant funding, Antietam can complete the renovations scheduled to take place at the MPPC and follow through on its plan for a new K-3 facility. Once completed, the MPPC will serve as a high school for Antietam students. It has been a challenging past year for our constituents living in the Antietam School District as they have endeavored to make the best out of a bad situation. Grant funding would go a long way towards advancing these projects without putting all the pressure to foot the bill on local taxpayers already saddled with the highest property tax rate in Berks County, and who have been denied federal disaster assistance.

For the reasons outlined in this letter, we respectfully urge you to carefully consider the merits of the applications submitted by the Antietam School District for PSFIG grant funding, with a view toward granting the total amount requested. We also request that the DCED and the Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) consider waiving any required match under the emergency clause stipulated in the grant program guidelines. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Judith L. Schwank
Senator – 11th District


Mark L. Rozzi
Representative – 126th District

[1] <https://www.senatorschwank.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PA-TD-Letter.pdf>