

## Veto No. 1980-3

HB 1111

July 11, 1980

To the Honorable, the House of Representatives  
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

I return herewith, without my approval, House Bill 1111, Printer's No. 3052, entitled "An act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled 'An act relating to the public school system, including certain provisions applicable as well to private and parochial schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the laws relating thereto,' providing for division and organization of certain school districts."

My objection to this legislation derives from my perception that it seeks to reverse a 15-year positive trend towards school consolidation in Pennsylvania. In 1963, when efforts by the State Board of Education to unify school districts began, Pennsylvania had 2,200 separate districts. Today we have successfully reduced the number of districts to 505. These efforts have substantially improved the quality of education by allowing the specialization of educational programs and facilities, and increasing the efficiency of administration and operations.

This effort towards school consolidation, while serving the common good, has been accompanied by extraordinary amounts of local strife. At times this controversy has been sufficiently bitter and severe to damage educational programs and polarize community attitudes. Fortunately, after 15 years of intensive State and local efforts, most of this controversy is behind us. We are now able to focus our attention and resources towards our real goal — the progress of public education.

The legislation before me today, unfortunately, offers the potential of reopening old wounds and dragging us backwards into yesterday's conflicts and controversies. It establishes procedures, initially applicable only to 12 districts, which can lead to school deconsolidation. In today's environment of decreasing class size, school closings, and severe resource constraints, Pennsylvania taxpayers simply cannot afford the potential proliferation of smaller and more numerous school districts.

I recognize, however, that within any school district there may be profound and good faith disagreements on educational philosophy. The best way to accommodate these differing perspectives is through local coordination and compromise. Within any school district, and even within a single school building, there is the potential for considerable diversity. Arrangements can be worked out for considerable community autonomy, as well as for interdistrict cooperation and

program coordination. The path to achieving educational diversity, however, is through cooperation and compromise within existing governmental units.

My action on this bill is further supported by the Secretary of Education and the unanimous vote of the State Board of Education.

For all of these reasons, I must disapprove this bill.

DICK THORNBURGH