

OKLAHOMA CITY — Superintendent Janet Barresi told State Board of Education members Thursday that the Department of Education will face a challenge with mid-year adjustments this year. Barresi said her department was alerted earlier this year by a legislator that Ponca City Superintendent David Pennington had brought forth information about miscalculation in state aid that has been occurring annually since 1992. As reported earlier in the Tulsa World, at issue is local property tax revenue, called ad valorem, from commercial personal property and agricultural personal property. “In the calculation of state funding to districts, as you know, the funding formula accounts for ad valorem tax revenues,” Barresi said to board members. “In that factoring, state law enacted in 1992 mandated that agricultural and commercial personal property taxes should be capped at 11 percent. Moreover, the statute noted that the Oklahoma Tax Commission would provide that necessary data to the State Department of Education.” That has not been happening for more than 20 years, she said. “We agree the change does need to be made, but frankly, we do not know when it can happen,” Barresi said. The new calculations will lead to the re-allocation of millions of dollars, she said. “Some districts will see a sizable increase in state dollars; more districts will see a decrease,” she said. The Oklahoma Tax Commission is responsible for providing the education department with the data needed for the state-aid calculations, and the commission will be unable to provide the new data until early January. Barresi said when the issue was brought to her attention she immediately directed staff to move ahead to remedy the problem. The department will work as quickly as possible to try to meet the statutory requirement to have midyear adjustments ready by Jan. 15, but is dependent on data from the Tax Commission. Barresi said superintendents throughout the state will be receiving notice about the issue as quickly as possible. Asked to comment on the situation, Paula Ross, communications director at the Oklahoma Tax Commission, said: “The Tax Commission provides each year the numbers requested by education that are utilized for state aid formulas calculations. These numbers include such items as net assessed

valuation by school district and assessment percentages for the various classes of property. This year the agricultural and commercial property numbers were requested and will be provided.â€• Pennington said he first uncovered the stateâ€™s error 10 years ago but couldnâ€™t get anyone in local or state government to understand his concerns. On Thursday afternoon, the Ponca City superintendent said he wished Barresi had gone a bit further in her comments but he still gives her credit for her statement at the monthly board meeting.

â€œI wish she would have said, â€˜Weâ€™re not sending out the midyear adjustment until itâ€™s right,â€™ but I appreciate her taking this on. She could have just washed her hands of it and let the next state superintendent deal with it,â€• he said. World staff writer Andrea Eger contributed to this story. Nour Habib 918-581-8369 nour.habib@tulsaworld.com