



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony

presented to the

House Appropriations Committee

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2023-24 House Appropriations Hearing Testimony

Majority Chair Harris, Minority Chair Grove, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss Governor Shapiro's 2023-24 Budget Proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

I am Dr. Khalid Mumin, and I have the immense privilege of serving as Pennsylvania's Acting Secretary of Education. With me today are Angela Fitterer, the Department's Executive Deputy Secretary, and Jessica Sites, Director of our Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management.

To ensure that every Pennsylvania student has access to a quality education, it is imperative that the Commonwealth continue to invest in Pennsylvania's public education system and target solutions that prepare learners of all ages for the current and future workforce. Governor Shapiro's proposed budget is the first step toward a comprehensive solution to improve schools, distribute education dollars adequately and equitably, support our teachers, and lead learners on a pathway to success.

Investing in High-Quality Early Childhood Education

Children who participate in high-quality pre-Kindergarten programs perform better in school, they are more likely to graduate high school, and earn more throughout their lives compared to peers without access to early learning programs. Yet, it is difficult for early learning providers to provide quality, consistent education when staff can earn higher salaries working in retail. That's why the Governor is proposing an additional **\$30 million for the PA Pre-K Counts Program** to increase rates to \$11,000 per full-time seat (an increase of \$1,000 per seat) and \$5,500 per parttime seat (\$500 increase per seat); and an additional **\$2.7 million in the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program**. These increases will help providers to mitigate staffing concerns, to increase salaries to competitive, family-sustaining wages, and to provide professional development opportunities to meet state certification requirements. The Governor's budget also includes a **\$10.4 million increase in Preschool Early Intervention** to support the 63,000 children ages three to five years of age with developmental and social-emotional delays and disabilities.

Continuing Fair and Equitable Investments in K-12 Education

The foundation of strong and safe communities starts with an adequate and equitable public education system. That's why the Governor's proposed budget includes more than \$1 billion in additional funding for K-12 education. These investments include:

- **\$567.4 million increase for Basic Education Funding:** The Governor's budget makes a significant down payment on a comprehensive solution to education funding in Pennsylvania with an increase of \$567.4 million for basic education funding. The increase in funding will be distributed through the funding formula enacted in June 2016,

which directs money to school districts based on factors such as the number of students enrolled and the poverty level of those students.

- **\$103.8 million increase for Special Education Funding:** The proposed budget includes an increase of \$103.8 million for special education to help school districts provide high-quality special education services to students with disabilities and special needs.
- **\$17.3 million increase in career and technical education:** Career and technical education (CTE) is critical to ensuring businesses can find workers with the skills they are looking for and every Pennsylvanian has the freedom to chart their own course. More than 220 school districts, charter schools, and career and technical centers offer nearly 2,000 PDE-approved CTE programs providing education and training to 68,600 students. This system creates work-ready students with credentials to jump right into employment opportunities through a variety of avenues including, but not limited to, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and internships. The Governor's budget makes important targeted investments in CTE by allocating \$7 million to the Secondary Career and Technical Education subsidy, providing an additional \$3.3 million for CTE equipment grants and investing another \$7 million in programs to establish and expand CTE programs statewide.
- **\$38.5 million to continue Pennsylvania's Universal Free Breakfast Program:** Every day, 60 percent of school children in the Commonwealth rely on the National School Breakfast and Lunch programs to meet their daily nutritional needs. Students cannot pay attention or do their best when they are hungry. That's why the Governor is proposing an additional \$38.5 million to continue providing universal free breakfast for all Pennsylvania students, regardless of income.
- **\$100 million in School Safety and Security Grants:** The Governor's budget directs \$100 million to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's School Safety and Security Committee to continue its School Safety and Security Grant program so that every student can be safe and feel safe in school. Grants are used to prevent and reduce violent incidents in schools, to purchase safety and security-related equipment, and to provide training and compensation for school resource and police officers.
- **\$100 million for a School-based Mental Health Block Grant:** Approximately 100,000 public school students in the Commonwealth attend a school with no school counselor; this includes more than 36,000 elementary students. Yet, the need for mental health programs for students and staff has never been greater. In the 2023-24 budget proposal, Governor Shapiro is committing \$500 million over the next five years for school districts and charter schools to hire school counselors, social workers and psychologists and implement mental health programs.

- **\$100 million to reduce and remediate environmental hazards in schools:** Students and educators deserve learning environments free from environmental risks. The Governor's budget allocates \$100 million for a School Environmental Repairs and Improvements Fund that will provide matching grants for schools to remediate environmental hazards. By remediating these risks, we can lower cumulative exposure across childhood, improve the cognitive and overall health outcomes for students, and increase their likelihood of academic and career success.

Like other states, Pennsylvania's educator workforce has been shrinking, especially in rural and urban districts and hard-to-fill areas like elementary education, special education, career and technical education, and STEM. Under the Governor's budget proposal, current residents that either acquire a license or certification in teaching, nursing or law enforcement after January 1, 2023, or individuals that move into Pennsylvania with a Pennsylvania-recognized credential in these fields will be eligible for a refundable tax credit up to \$2,500 a year for three years. This would be accomplished through Personal Income Tax returns to avoid extra burden in applying for the funding. The proposal is intended to guide more qualified candidates to fields where many employers involved with education, public health and safety are struggling to find workers.

Pathways to Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary education not only improves lifetime earnings for individuals and households, but it also prepares an overall skilled workforce to participate in and navigate an evolving labor market. From high school graduates pursuing career pathways to adults making career changes and adapting to shifts in workforce needs, Pennsylvanians need affordable options and support to obtain postsecondary credentials.

The Governor's 2023-24 Budget proposal includes a **\$60 million increase in funding for higher education institutions** to support effective operations and increase postsecondary access and completion.

- Community Colleges: \$5.1 million
- Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education: \$11 million
- Penn State University: \$17.2 million
- Pennsylvania College of Technology: \$1.9 million
- Transfer to Agricultural College Land Scrip Fund: \$1.2 million
- University of Pittsburgh (including Rural Education Outreach): \$11 million
- Temple University: \$11.2 million
- Lincoln University: \$1.1 million
- Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology: \$389,000

Today's postsecondary students increasingly struggle with food and housing insecurity. Parenting students are even more likely to face basic needs insecurities while also bearing the cost of childcare. Nationally, at least one in five college students is parenting a child while

pursuing a postsecondary degree. This budget proposes an additional **\$1.6 million for the Parent Pathways Learning Network** to scale an existing pilot program to benefit additional parenting students pursuing a postsecondary education. With this support, the Department will work closely with other state agencies to remove barriers and enable parenting students to succeed.

To further reduce barriers to economic prosperity, the Governor's budget includes roughly **\$1 million to cover the cost of high school equivalency exams** for students in need.

Approximately 646,000 adults ages 18 to 64 in Pennsylvania are without a high school credential, and a major barrier to obtaining their high school equivalency is cost. Of the 6,126 individuals who took at least one subtest of either the GED test or HiSET exam between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, nearly 2,240 did not take the full battery of tests. Through the Governor's initiative, we can broaden the Commonwealth's workforce and help Pennsylvanians gain the credential they might need to develop skills and gain experience necessary to achieve economic security and financial stability.

Increasing Access to Pennsylvania Libraries

Libraries are vital hubs for Pennsylvanians, providing the space and resources for residents to learn, become informed about civic and municipal issues, access telehealth, and build community. Libraries provide access to job search materials and computers to apply for jobs and access a variety of state services, including voter registration. Yet, many of Pennsylvania's public libraries have been unable to complete facility improvements necessary to serve all members of their communities. These deficiencies range from accessibility issues to insufficient electrical wiring and other infrastructure needed to offer spaces to access online services in a semi-private setting. This is particularly an issue for small rural public libraries that lack the matching funds necessary to apply for facility grants from the existing capital improvement programs. With a **\$4.2 million investment in a Public Library Facilities Improvement Fund**, small rural public libraries that need minor facility repairs and improvements will have access to targeted funds. This grant program will build the capacity of libraries to meet the needs of all community members by prioritizing accessibility, efficiency, necessary repairs, and upgrades of semi-private meeting rooms and digital skills and technology use spaces.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss the Governor's 2023-24 budget proposal for the Department of Education and how the Commonwealth can continue to support all aspects of our education, workforce development, and library systems.