



Pennsylvania
Department of Education

Testimony

presented to the

House Appropriations Committee

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2026-2027 House Appropriations Hearing Testimony

Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss Governor Shapiro’s 2026-2027 budget proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). I am Dr. Carrie Rowe, and I have the honor and privilege to serve as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Secretary of Education. With me today are my colleagues:

- Shante’ Brown, Deputy Secretary of Child Development and Early Learning;
- Dr. Lynette Kuhn, Deputy Secretary of Postsecondary and Higher Education;
- Amy Lena, Deputy Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education; and
- Jessica Sites, Director of the Bureau of Financial Operations.

Education is a great equalizer that provides learners with the opportunity to succeed. Governor Shapiro’s 2026-2027 proposed budget affirms and continues the progress made over the past three years to ensure that we, as state policymakers, are meeting our obligation to create an education system that provides all Pennsylvanians with the freedom to chart their own course.

Adequately Funding Our Schools

The 2026-2027 budget proposal aims to expand upon the historic and bipartisan investments made in last year’s budget by strengthening our support of the Commonwealth’s schools. This budget ensures that K-12 schools have the necessary resources to provide Pennsylvania’s students with a high-quality, world-class education. Governor Shapiro’s proposed budget includes:

- \$565 million increase to the Ready to Learn Adequacy and Tax Equity Supplements to build on the investments enacted in the 2025-2026 budget; and
- \$50 million increase to Basic Education Funding to expand on the contributions made through the Basic Education Funding Formula.

Supporting Special Education

The proposed budget includes a \$50 million increase in Special Education Funding. Local Education Agencies are required to provide special education services to all eligible students. Costs of special education programs continue to rise, and it is essential that schools have the necessary resources to meet the needs of every learner that enters their classrooms.

Career and Technical Education

In 2025, [Pennsylvania was ranked as the best in the nation in Middle School Career Exploration](#). Additionally, as a result of the Shapiro Administration’s commitment to – and significant investment in – bringing career and technical education (CTE) back into our classrooms, more

than 3,000 additional students are now enrolled in CTE programs in Pennsylvania schools. To capitalize on this progress, Governor Shapiro's proposed 2026-2027 budget includes a \$14.3 million increase to CTE funding. CTE programs are uniquely able to provide students with immediate access to training that prepares them for success whether they choose to go to college or not. This funding ensures students have continued access to essential CTE programming and addresses barriers to entry into these programs.

Safe and Healthy Learners

PDE's number one priority is to ensure students have access to environments where they are safe, healthy, and prepared to learn. That is why this budget proposal includes:

- Continued investment in safe and healthy school facilities. The 2026-2027 budget proposal includes \$100 million to the PA Department of Community and Economic Development for the **Public School Facility Improvement Program** and \$25 million **Solar for Schools Program**. Public School Facility Improvement grants help schools to fix leaking roofs, upgrade heating and cooling systems, address accessibility issues, and undertake other necessary projects, all of which ensure our school facilities are safe, adequate, and ready for learning. In addition, the budget proposal calls for the creation of a new \$1 billion Critical Infrastructure Fund to support vital infrastructure projects, including upgrades to school facilities.
- \$14.3 million increase to School Food Services to continue the **Universal Free Breakfast Program** and to support state reimbursements for all breakfast and reduced cost lunches. Students cannot be expected to learn on an empty stomach, which is why the Department continues to invest in their nutritional needs. Over 92 million breakfast meals were served last school year, representing a 14% increase since the program's inception in 2023-2024.
- \$3 million to maintain the **Menstrual Hygiene Product Grant** to ensure that students do not miss instruction time due to a lack of access to these essential health care products. This program enables the Pennsylvania Department of Health to provide funding to schools for both products and dispensers to ensure these products are available at no cost to students who need them.
- A call to the General Assembly to deliver a bill removing the distraction of cell phones in schools. Supporting our students means not only investing the necessary resources in our schools but also creating a healthy, productive learning environment. By removing the temptation of cell phones in the classroom, we can ensure students spend more time focused on learning, interacting with their peers, and developing the critical skills they'll need later in life.
- Directing the State Board of Education to develop recommendations for schools regarding recess for Pennsylvania students. Recess isn't just an extra block on the

schedule; it is an important component of student wellbeing and a valuable learning opportunity. During recess, students can clear their heads, move their bodies, and learn how to better engage with one another, all of which are fundamental to children's growth and development.

Continuing Cyber Charter Reform

Act 47 of 2025 included many long overdue and essential reforms to the way that cyber charter schools are funded and operate in the Commonwealth. To build on the bipartisan progress that was made last year, the 2026-2027 budget proposes additional reforms, including further expanding deductions to school facilities and student activities so that the structure of cyber charter funding better aligns with the actual cost of providing online instruction. These common-sense measures, coupled with the reforms enacted last year, will save school districts up to \$250 million each year.

Investments in Early Learning

The journey of lifelong learning often begins with access to a high-quality early childhood education program. To ensure access to these essential resources, the 2026-2027 proposed budget includes a \$7.5 million increase to the successful Pre-K Counts program. This funding will be used to increase the rate per full-time seat from \$10,750 to \$11,000 and the rate per part-time seat from \$5,375 to \$5,500. By increasing these funding rates, this proposed budget stabilizes the Pre-K educator workforce and addresses the crucial shortage issues that our child care providers face.

The Preschool Early Intervention (EI) program supports vulnerable children ages three through five by providing them with evidence-based, foundational services. This proposed budget includes a \$51.2 million increase to the EI program, which would continue to fulfill our statutory obligation to ensure every eligible child in the Commonwealth is receiving the support that they are entitled to receive. The proposed funding reflects the increasing costs of providing these services, including general operating and contractual expenses.

The budget proposal also includes a \$2.1 million increase for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. This funding will be used to increase the rate per seat from \$13,900 to \$14,200. The federal Head Start program delivers Pre-K services to families who fall below the federal poverty level or are experiencing homelessness. This state-level supplemental program allows providers to serve additional families. Adequately funding these programs ensures that children receive the high-quality support and resources they need to improve their overall well-being, regardless of their financial status.

Strengthening Our Teacher Workforce Pipeline

One of the most impactful determinants of a student's success is the presence of a high-quality and fully certified professional educator in their classroom. PDE is working diligently to address

the ongoing educator workforce shortage by removing unnecessary barriers to entering the teaching profession, utilizing funds to further strengthen the educator pipeline, and enhancing teacher retention efforts. PDE is proud of the achievements made in Act 47 of 2025 – a result of our ongoing partnership with the General Assembly – and we aim to continue that progress.

The 2026-2027 budget proposal includes a \$5 million increase for the **Student Teacher Support Program**, which provides stipends to student teachers. The total proposed allocation for this program, facilitated by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), is \$35 million. Since its inception, this program has served over 4,000 student teachers who commit to working for at least 3 years in Pennsylvania schools.

Investments in Higher Education

Building on the Governor’s bold reimagining of higher education during his first three years in office, this budget places a special emphasis on the future of our Commonwealth. By investing in our robust public institutions of higher education, we create a system of postsecondary and higher education that empowers all Pennsylvanians with the freedom to chart their own course. This proposed budget incentivizes institutions to meet the needs of employers and prepare students to participate in our growing economy. This budget proposes an additional \$30 million for Penn State, Pitt, and Temple, to be distributed through the Performance-Based Funding Formula created by Act 47 of 2025. Furthermore, this proposal provides an additional \$1.1 million for Lincoln University.

For the first time, the Commonwealth’s institutions of higher education are strategically collaborating as a sector. The State Board of Higher Education has unanimously adopted a strategic plan aimed to strengthen the fiscal health and stability of our institutions, promote increased postsecondary credential attainment, support increased economic and workforce development, and ensure efficient, effective use of state funds.

Commonwealth Libraries

Libraries are an essential element of the educational ecosystem in the Commonwealth. Our public libraries provide critical access to the internet, job search tools, and resources that encourage and cultivate a culture of lifelong learning. In today’s information and media literacy environment, libraries provide evidence-based resources that help communities recognize bias and distinguish credible information. Libraries help support and bolster the landscape of early literacy by providing communities with convenient and informed programming for children from birth through age five. The 2025-2026 enacted budget included a \$5 million increase for the Public Library Subsidy, and the Governor’s proposed 2026-2027 budget reflects continued support for this increased investment.

Conclusion

The 2026-2027 budget proposal continues to build on the historic progress that we have achieved in a bipartisan manner during Governor Shapiro's first three years in office. This budget is centered on our collective values: that every learner in the Commonwealth deserves access to public education that prepares them to succeed in school and in life.

Chairs and respected members of the House Appropriations Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions and continuing our partnership to ensure all Pennsylvanians have the resources they need to learn, grow, and thrive.