



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony

presented to the

House Appropriations Committee

by **Noe Ortega, Secretary of Education**

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2022-23 Appropriations Hearing Testimony

Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford, Chairman Sonney, Chairman Longiotti, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to join you today in this august chamber to discuss Governor Tom Wolf's 2022-23 Budget Proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

I am Dr. Noe Ortega and I have the immense privilege of serving as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education. With me today are colleagues on the senior leadership team including:

- Tracey Campanini, who serves as dual PDE/DHS Deputy Secretary for the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL).
- Sherri Smith, Ed.D, who serves as Deputy Secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE).
- Tanya Garcia, Ph.D, who serves as Deputy Secretary and Commissioner for Postsecondary and Higher Education (OPSHE).
- Susan Banks, MLIS, who serves as Acting Deputy Secretary for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (OCL) as well as our PA State Librarian.
- Hannah Barrick, who serves as Deputy Secretary for the Department's Office of Administration.

This administration's historic support of education across all levels is an investment in the well-being of families, communities, and the economy. A quality education impacts every part of life, from cultivating talents and strengths, to empowering students to be engaged citizens, and developing skills the future workforce will demand. In addition, the pandemic has underlined the vital roles that educational institutions play in students' lives beyond their studies. Schools provide a safe, welcoming space and an opportunity to ensure that children can access the resources they need – whether it's additional services to optimize learning, mental health support, or reliable, healthy meals.

Despite these historic investments, disparities in access to high-quality, fully resourced education systems, and educational outcomes still exist. In order to address these disparities, PDE is recommitting to its core mission, to ensure every child in Pennsylvania has access to a quality education. The governor's 2022-23 budget proposal includes continued investments to support not only children and families, but also the heroic educators who dedicate their careers to this mission.

During the past seven years, Governor Wolf has secured an additional \$1.8 billion in funding for pre-K through college, including more than \$1.1 billion for basic education, \$190 million for special education, and \$40 million for career and technical education. These efforts are already bearing fruit, as the innovative PAsmart program introduced new STEM and computer science

programs into hundreds of schools across Pennsylvania, helping advance the commonwealth to 5th in the nation for the number of STEM graduates.

Under Governor Wolf's leadership, the Commonwealth has sought to bridge the gap between the classroom and employment by supporting career and technical education and building a new apprenticeship program. Throughout this administration, the number of CTE students earning industry-recognized credentials has increased by 38.7%, while the number of registered apprentices has risen to 18,200.

The 2022-23 budget builds on these successful education and workforce development programs, further extending high-quality education to more Pennsylvanians; and laying a strong foundation for Pennsylvania's future workers, citizens, and leaders.

Investing in High-Quality Early Childhood Education

PDE knows that children who participate in high-quality pre-K programs perform better in school, are more likely to graduate, and earn more throughout their lives compared to peers without access to early learning programs. The 2022-23 budget proposes **\$60 million** for Pre-K Counts to increase the rate for full-time slots to \$10,000 (\$1,250 increase per slot) and \$5,000 for part time slots (\$625 increase per slot). Increased rates are necessary to support the workforce and rising costs to providers. An additional 2,308 slots will also be made available to enroll in the commonwealth's high-quality early learning programs. **\$10 million** for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program is also proposed to meet need and cover costs of the program. Over Governor Wolf's term, the commonwealth has more than doubled its investment in early childhood education, but more children need the opportunity to enter kindergarten ready to grow and thrive.

Continuing Fair and Equitable Investments in K-12 Education

Over the past seven years, the administration worked with the General Assembly to reverse cuts to education and make historic investments of nearly \$1.4 billion in new resources for Pennsylvania's K-12 public education system. The 2022-23 budget builds on this progress to ensure every Pennsylvania student is college, career, and community ready. The new investments for classroom funding include:

\$1.25 billion increase in Basic Education Fair Funding Formula. This investment enables all school districts to have the basic resources they need to provide a high-quality education for Pennsylvania students. With this increase, more than \$2 billion, or 26.5 percent, of total Basic Education Funding, will be distributed through the fair funding formula enacted in June 2016 to provide a more equitable and predictable allocation to school districts across Pennsylvania.

\$300 million increase in Level Up. This targeted investment provides more equitable funding to the 100 most underfunded districts and the students they serve. This investment, combined with

the increase to the Fair Funding Formula, means that more than 30 percent of all Basic Education Funding will be allocated to school districts based on the demographics of students today.

\$200 million increase in Special Education Funding Formula. This investment ensures school districts have the basic resources they need to provide high-quality special education services to students with disabilities and special needs.

Supporting College Students and Postsecondary Pathways

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 education. Postsecondary education not only improves lifetime earnings for individuals and households, it prepares an overall skilled workforce to participate in and navigate an evolving labor market. The State Board of Education established a goal for 60 percent of working-age Pennsylvanians to have a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025, with a focus on closing attainment gaps for historically underrepresented populations.

Investing in Students - The Nellie Bly Scholarship Program

Direct investment in students through a need-based scholarship program will support equitable access to and enrollment in PA State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and Pennsylvania's community colleges. The 2022-23 budget proposes a \$200 million investment in the full cost of attendance to PASSHE students, funded by the Race Horse Development Trust Fund and federal funds. The program will provide financial assistance to full-time students with a focus on those pursuing programs in Pennsylvania's high-need sectors, including those facing shortages related to the pandemic like health care, education, and public service. Recipients must agree to stay in Pennsylvania after graduation for the same number of years for which they receive the benefit. This needs-based tuition will fill the gap between the students' financial aid and other financial assistance to cover the tuition, fees, and a portion of the real costs of college, including campus housing, books, supplies, and other expenses. The tuition converts to a loan if the student moves out of the commonwealth during the commitment period and can be deferred while the student pursues further education.

Investing in the Postsecondary Sector

Pennsylvania's diverse postsecondary institutions and options for career pathways continue to be some of the commonwealth's greatest assets. **A \$125 million increase** in funding for higher education institutions (5 percent for most entities) will continue to support effective operations and increase postsecondary access and completion.

- Community Colleges and Capital Fund – \$14.9 million

- Penn State University – \$12.1 million
- Pennsylvania College of Technology – \$1.3 million
- Transfer to Agricultural College Land Scrip Fund – \$2.7 million
- University of Pittsburgh (including Rural Education Outreach) – \$7.7 million
- Temple University – \$7.9 million
- Lincoln University – \$758,000
- Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology – \$935,000

In addition, the more than 100 private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania provide vital educational opportunities and research initiatives for students throughout the commonwealth. The budget proposes a **\$663,000 increase for Institutional Assistance Grants**, which provide financial assistance to independent nonprofit postsecondary institutions based on the number of State Grant-receiving students. The 2022-23 budget also includes a **\$1.6 million** increase for the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Infectious Disease through the Department of Agriculture. PASSHE must be affordable, high quality, and responsive to community and workforce needs across the commonwealth. Recent data demonstrates the important role of public higher education in social mobility. Support for PASSHE is an investment in local communities, as a significant proportion of graduates stay in Pennsylvania following graduation

Expanding It’s On Us PA for Safe Campus Environments

An additional **\$500,000** investment in the It’s On Us PA initiative will expand resources and awareness to promote healthy relationships and protect students from sexual violence. Current grant funding is used to promote awareness, prevention, and reporting of sexual assault incidents; remove and reduce barriers to reporting or accessing resources; and demonstrate leadership to ensure a safe and welcoming culture on campuses. Additional funding will strengthen protections for victims and support-related resources.

Ensuring Basic Skills Competencies for All Adults

A significant number of adults in Pennsylvania need support to obtain basic skills and credentials, such as a High School Equivalency diploma and valuable digital skills, necessary to access postsecondary education, training opportunities, and sustainable employment. A **\$500,000** increase to Adult Education and Family Literacy will provide support for Pennsylvania’s adult learners and increase access to education and career pathways.

Increasing the Public Library Subsidy and Investing in the State Library

The Governor has proposed a vital **\$1 million increase** to the Public Library Subsidy in order to ensure that each district center receives no less than \$200k. The public library subsidy is

distributed to Statewide Resource Centers, District Library Centers, County Coordination Aid, and directly to public libraries and libraries including funds for Equalization. The network of libraries across Pennsylvania relies on this funding for operational costs. The increase the governor is proposing will be a vital support for the system. Libraries build literacy skills for all Pennsylvanians and provide equitable access to information and shared community resources. Governor Wolf's budget proposal also includes a **\$250,000** increase for the State Library. This line item is the primary source of funding for the Office of Commonwealth Libraries and the State Library of Pennsylvania. The State Library is a major resource library providing extensive general and reference services for state government as well as collections of PA newspapers, government publications, and rare books and materials.

Conclusion

With the 2022-23 Budget Proposal, the Department is prioritizing education at every level and building on Governor Wolf's two-terms of investment in PA students, educators, and communities. Chairmen and esteemed members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to join you today in this august chamber to discuss Governor Tom Wolf's final Budget Proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). The proposal builds on successful education and workforce development programs, further extending high-quality education to more Pennsylvanians; and laying a strong foundation for Pennsylvania's future workers, citizens, and leaders.