



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony

presented to the

House Appropriations Committee

Khalid N. Mumin, Ed.D., Secretary of Education

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

2024-2025 House Appropriations Hearing Testimony

Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to join you today to discuss Governor Shapiro's 2024-25 budget proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

I am Dr. Khalid Mumin and I have the honor and privilege to serve as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education. With me today are my colleagues on the senior leadership team including:

- Dr. Carrie Rowe, Deputy Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education;
- Dr. Kate Shaw, Deputy Secretary of Postsecondary and Higher Education; and
- Jessica Sites, Director of the Bureau of Budget and Fiscal Management.

Pennsylvania's students deserve a high-quality education that not only allows them to be effective in the classroom, but that also equips them with the skills and opportunities to chart their own path to success. Governor Shapiro's budget proposal is a strong step towards doing exactly that by capitalizing on the potential of our youngest learners, creating more opportunity in our classrooms, ensuring that our public education system is both adequately and equitably funded, and making substantial reforms to how we administer higher education.

The 2024-2025 budget proposal is focused on creating a culture of lifelong learning, supporting the development of our teachers, building safe and strong school communities, and guaranteeing that students are prepared to engage civically and to participate in the economy of today and of the future.

Investments in Basic Education Funding

Building on the historic investments enacted in the 2023-2024 budget, the 2024-2025 budget proposal includes robust investments to our public school system. The 2024-2025 budget proposal includes a \$1.072 billion increase in basic education funding, by far the largest increase in Pennsylvania history. Under Governor Shapiro's proposed budget:

- \$872 million will be a first-year adequacy investment, as recommended by the Basic Education Funding Commission; and
- \$200 million will be distributed through the Basic Education Funding formula, with recommended updates to reduce volatility and improve predictability and stability of funding.

Funding Special Education

The proposed budget includes a \$50 million increase in special education funding to help protect our most vulnerable students. School districts are required to provide special education services to all eligible students, and with the rising costs of these programs, it is essential that school districts have the resources to ensure that students with disabilities and special needs have the supports they need. To mitigate risk to students and educators, the 2024-2025 budget proposal includes a \$545,000 increase for PDE's Program Monitoring and Accountability Office. This funding will improve the Department's ability to monitor special education programs' compliance with federal and state reporting requirements and enhance the Department's ability to conduct audits of these funds statewide.

Career and Technical Education and Dual Enrollment Opportunities

This budget proposal continues to empower students with the opportunity to chart their own course by proposing a \$2.4 million increase in Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding. Students can choose to attend one of Pennsylvania's nearly 2,000 approved CTE programs and participate in pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and internships that launch them into a career. The budget proposal also includes \$7 million in dual enrollment funding to expand advanced college credit options while in high school. Governor Shapiro's proposed increased investments in CTE and dual enrollment will open the doors of opportunity for our students and ensure that our workforce has the skillset to meet the needs of our Pennsylvania businesses.

Ensuring Safe and Healthy School Facilities

During the Basic Education Funding Commission hearings, stakeholders expressed the need for additional support for school facilities. In the Panther Valley School District, kindergarteners are forced to learn in rooms without air conditioning because the district cannot afford the upgrades. The Sto-Rox School District has at least \$14 million in work that must be done to fix leaking roofs in all three of its school buildings. No Pennsylvania student should be asked to learn in an environment that is not safe or conducive to effective learning. To address this, the proposed budget includes a \$300 million investment in school facilities. This funding builds on the School Environmental Repairs Grant Program created this year to develop sustainable solutions to environmental issues that prevent students from achieving in the classroom.

Other initiatives that will contribute to safe and healthy school environments include:

- **\$16.7 million increase to Universal Free Breakfast Program:** Students cannot pay attention in class when they are hungry. Governor Shapiro's first budget included funding to deliver free breakfast to 1.7 million students at approximately 3,150 schools. This funding will also continue to provide free lunches for children that qualify for reduced meals under the National School Lunch Program. Additional investments in this highly successful program must be made to continue to ensure that our students never have to worry about receiving a nutritious meal to start their day.

- **\$3 million for free feminine hygiene products in school:** Nearly one in every four teenage girls nationally has missed class due to the lack of feminine hygiene products available to them in school. With this investment, the Department of Health can help schools purchase product dispensers and make sure hygiene products are readily available at no cost to students who need them.
- **\$50 million for School Safety and Security:** Every student deserves to *be* safe and *feel* safe in their school. The Governor’s 2024-2025 budget calls for continuing a \$50 million annual investment in school safety and security improvements.
- **\$100 million for K-12 Mental Health:** Schools are often frontline responders for students experiencing mental health crises. Our schools need a robust and sustainable mental health infrastructure to address the dynamic and challenging needs of our students. Lack of resources or stigma should never get in the way of Pennsylvania students and staff receiving support from trained professionals.

Investments in Early Learning

Every child in Pennsylvania deserves the support they need to succeed from infancy through early adulthood. Students who receive high quality pre-K are more likely to graduate high school and lead a successful life. To give our youngest learners the foundation they deserve, the 2024-2025 budget calls for a \$30 million increase for the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program to increase the cost per seat, which will give providers the funds to raise wages and stabilize the early educator workforce. With this funding increase, the cost per seat will increase from \$10,000 to \$11,000 for full time seats and from \$5,000 to \$5,500 for part time seats.

The budget proposal also includes a \$2.7 million increase in funding for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. The federal Head Start program provides comprehensive pre-K education resources to families at or below the federal poverty level or experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care. An additional \$17 million is allocated to the Preschool Early Intervention program to continue providing essential services to families and communities to address the needs of children from birth to age five with developmental delays. Increasing funding for both of these programs ensures that children receive the high-quality support and resources they need to improve their overall well-being regardless of family income.

Cyber School Reform

The cost of cyber charter school tuition for Pennsylvania’s school districts varies widely from \$8,639 and \$26,564 per non-special education student. It does not cost a cyber charter school more to educate a student from one district than it does a student from any other, so why should some school districts pay more? This outdated model restricts funding that school districts could use to update facilities, develop curriculum, and provide students with essential services. The 2024-2025 budget proposal establishes an \$8,000 per student statewide cyber charter tuition rate to better align tuition costs with the costs of providing online education. This proposal will save school districts an estimated \$262 million annually.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Pennsylvania faces a growing teacher shortage that has negatively affected student outcomes and prevented our schools from recruiting top talent. In the past 12 years, the number of undergraduate education majors in Pennsylvania has dropped 66 percent. The shrinking pipeline of new teachers, particularly in the areas of special education, STEM, and bilingual/English language instruction, has dire implications for schools and the future of the Commonwealth's workforce. This systemic issue particularly affects our urban and rural areas, low-income communities, and students of color.

Recognizing the urgency of this problem, the Governor proposes a \$5 million increase to the student teacher stipend program established under the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, bringing the total allocation to \$15 million. Additionally, this budget proposes \$10 million for the previously unfunded Talent Recruitment Account to increase participation in the education workforce by covering tuition, fees, supplies or other costs that serve as barriers to employment; and a \$450,000 increase in funding to support the Talent Recruitment Office in the Department. This funding builds on pre-existing mechanisms and gives the Department the capacity it needs to address the educator shortage and incentivize highly qualified educators to join and remain in the profession in Pennsylvania.

Once an individual becomes an educator, we must continue to support them by listening to their needs and addressing the concerns they see in the classroom. The jobs of teachers have been made even more difficult due to the misinformation children see online and bring to school. The Governor's proposed budget includes a \$5 million increase for teacher professional development for PDE to develop a toolkit on information literacy for teachers and parents and to provide training to educators on how to address difficult topics in the classroom, as well as to continue to provide professional development to educators on new standards and requirements adopted by the State Board of Education such as the science of reading and personal finance.

Reimagining Higher Education

The Governor's proposed budget includes a bold proposal to rethink Pennsylvania's higher education system. A strong higher education system is crucial for Pennsylvania's future, but what we're doing now is not working. Decades of inadequate investments in higher education institutions have led to Pennsylvania being ranked 49th for state funding of postsecondary education. Tuition increases have forced students to take on more debt, resulting in Pennsylvanians carrying the 3rd largest student debt load in the country. To look for a solution to these issues, our administration has spent the last year garnering feedback from representatives of Pennsylvania's public universities, state-related institutions, community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and private nonprofit institutions who provided recommendations to help make higher education in Pennsylvania workforce-oriented, affordable, coordinated, transparent, and accountable.

The Governor's plan has three parts that collectively will help students build the skills and gain the credentials they need to obtain good-paying jobs in Pennsylvania, will ensure employers can find skilled workers their businesses need to thrive and grow, and will serve as an engine for the Commonwealth's economic success now and in the future.

Governance Structure

Considering the needs of higher education in Pennsylvania, we believe the best path forward is a new system that unites our 15 community colleges and Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities under a new governance system while still preserving local leadership. This structure will allow these institutions to coordinate on addressing the needs of students, filling workforce needs, and reducing costs for students. By working as a united force, community colleges and PASSHE universities can create affordable pathways to credentials and degrees. The 2024-2025 proposed budget includes a 15 percent increase in funding to the colleges and universities that will make up the new system; a 5 percent increase in funding for the Commonwealth's state related-universities; and a 15 percent increase in funding for Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology.

Performance-Based Funding

The Governor's higher education blueprint also calls for a performance-based funding formula that establishes predictability, instills accountability, and rewards institutions for achieving outcomes that benefit the Commonwealth. The formula will consider factors such as increasing enrollment, the number of first-generation students receiving credentials, and graduation rate. This formula will incentivize our institutions to prepare our students for their future while maintaining the independence of our trusted partners.

Affordability

Rising costs of postsecondary education has led to crushing student debt for students and their families, keeping opportunities such as buying a car or home out of reach and preventing Pennsylvanians from reaching their full potential. Beginning in 2025-2026, the Governor proposes to invest an additional \$279 million in financial aid so that students at or below the median income can receive a degree at any college or university in the new system for as little as \$1,000 in tuition and fees per semester. This additional \$279 million investment will also be used to increase the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) state grant awards by \$1,000 for students who choose to attend a private or state-related university.

The 2024-2025 budget includes a \$250,000 increase to the It's On Us PA grant program to ensure all postsecondary institutions in Pennsylvania have the tools necessary to address sexual violence on their campuses, promote awareness, and create support systems in their

communities. This proposed budget also includes a \$1 million increase in the Adult Education and Family Literacy program to help Pennsylvania adult learners obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, digital skills, and industry credentials that lead to employment with family-sustaining wages.

Commonwealth Libraries

Libraries provide an essential service to their communities and are often the only outlet for many underserved Pennsylvanians to access critical services and programming. Libraries provide resources such as enhanced broadband access, job search materials, and an abundance of learning tools. Communities with active libraries have more informed, civically involved, citizens. The Governor's budget includes a \$189,000 increase to continue supporting operations in the Office of Commonwealth Libraries and the State Library of Pennsylvania.

Conclusion

The 2024-2025 budget proposal builds on the momentum established by the investments made during Governor Shapiro's first year in office. This budget addresses the needs of all Pennsylvania learners, creates pathways to success, and acknowledges the importance that education plays in establishing an economy that works for all Pennsylvanians.

Chairmen and respected members of the House Appropriations Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to be before you today, and I look forward to working with the General Assembly to ensure all learners have access to high-quality education and resources and have pathways to success in Pennsylvania.