



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony

presented to the

House Appropriations Committee

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2019-20 Appropriations Hearing Testimony

Chairman Saylor, Chairman Bradford, Chairman Sonney, Chairman Roebuck, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss Governor Tom Wolf's 2019-20 Budget Proposal for the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is to ensure that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares children and adults to succeed as productive citizens. Further, the Department seeks to establish a culture that is committed to improving opportunities throughout the commonwealth by ensuring that technical support, resources, and optimal learning environments are available for all students, whether children or adults.

Governor Wolf's 2019-20 Proposed Budget aligns to our mission and promotes collaboration among stakeholders to coordinate education, workforce, and human services to aid families, students, and employers in moving the commonwealth forward. Pennsylvania's economic prosperity depends on a well-educated and highly-trained workforce. While investments in education over the last four years have made Pennsylvania a leader in STEM and computer science education, and expanded hands-on training for career and technical education for students, a gap remains where businesses cannot find skilled workers to fill vacancies and too many workers are caught in low-wage jobs without the required training to advance. The Governor's budget proposal outlines a strategy for tackling these challenges and strengthening our state's workforce, communities, and economy.

The Governor's budget proposal builds on the successful launch of the PAsmart initiative with a comprehensive plan to build the nation's strongest workforce through the Statewide Workforce, Education, and Accountability Program (SWEAP). This initiative brings the public and private sectors together in new ways, dedicated to increasing opportunities for Pennsylvanians from birth to retirement. The Governor's SWEAP initiative overhauls state government's approach to coordinating education, workforce development, and human services for people to secure the skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in high-demand jobs and earn family-sustaining wages. The plan strengthens and expands access to early childhood education, increases investments in PAsmart and other educational opportunities, and establishes partnerships with the private sector to craft innovative solutions that close the skills gap and rapidly meet the needs of employers. SWEAP includes 14 policy priorities spanning several state agencies – including Education, Human Services, Labor and Industry, and Community and Economic Development – and partners such as business and industry, and state and local workforce development boards. Through the newly established Keystone Economic Development and Workforce Command Center, multiple agencies and partners will collectively transform public programs and resources to address Pennsylvania's workforce shortage and talent needs.

Early Childhood Education

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 quality early learning programs. The Governor's proposed budget invests an additional \$50 million in early childhood education – \$40 million for Pre-K Counts and \$10 million for Head Start Supplemental Assistance – allowing an additional 5,500 children to enroll in the state's high-quality early learning programs. Combined with the increased funding of \$115 million over the past four years, this investment will more than double the funding for Pre-K Counts programs since 2014-15 and increase funding for Head Start Supplemental Assistance by 77 percent. Additionally, the Governor proposes an additional \$15 million in Preschool Early Intervention to provide special education services to children from age 3 to kindergarten. In 2018-19, nearly 57,500 children received Preschool Early Intervention services. The proposed investment will result in services for an additional 1,500 children in 2019-20. The proposal also includes an increase of \$5 million in state funds and \$1.8 million in federal funds to increase reimbursement rates paid to Early Intervention providers to recruit and retain qualified staff.

On the Human Services side of the Office of Childhood Development and Early Learning, the Governor has proposed investments that will expand the home-visiting program, reduce the waiting list for Child Care Works, and increase the provider subsidy for high-quality programs. PDE also is partnering with the Department of Human Services to establish the Parent Pathways initiative to provide a multigenerational, holistic approach to support parents pursuing college or other postsecondary training.

Elementary and Secondary Education

The 2019-20 Proposed Budget builds on prior-year increases in education funding to improve educational opportunities across the Commonwealth. Bipartisan support for increased and sustained state support for Pennsylvania schools has generated more than \$1 billion in new education funding over the past four years. PDE's priority continues to be on improved academic achievement and ensuring that all Pennsylvania schools graduate college, career, and community ready students.

The Governor's Proposed Budget includes a \$200 million increase in Basic Education Funding, the largest subsidy the Commonwealth provides to local school districts. School districts are encouraged to use these funds to invest in evidence-based strategies that will improve academic achievement. With a shared commitment to equity, these investments are driven out through the fair funding formula which takes into consideration both student- and district- based factors.

Further, the proposed budget includes a \$50 million increase in Special Education Funding, following \$90 million in increased investment over the last four years. Of this total investment, \$300,000 will be used for Keystone Telepresence Education Grants to enable children with serious illnesses or injuries, who are homebound, to attend class via telepresence technologies.

Regular attendance is a building block to student success in school. Pennsylvania's compulsory school attendance and dropout ages are outdated and should be aligned to current workforce expectations for skilled labor. The 2019-20 Budget proposes lowering the compulsory attendance age from 8 to 6 years old. This change will align with common practice in almost every other state and help foster student success; as research suggests an early start to formal schooling can improve language and literacy skills, increase student achievement, enhance social and emotional skill development, and reduce the need for remediation in later years. This modification is expected to impact enrollment by approximately 3,300 children statewide. Additionally, dropping out of school can have lifelong negative implications for a student. The budget proposes raising the minimum exit or dropout age for compulsory school attendance from 17 to 18 years old. In 2016-17, more than 4,000 17-year-old students left school before graduating, setting them on a path that in many cases leads to a lower annual income compared to high school graduates.

While lowering the compulsory school age to 6 is an important first step to aligning Pennsylvania's requirement to current norms, there will still be an estimated 49,000 5-year-olds not currently enrolled in school. This budget proposal also includes mandating a study on the effectiveness and impact of lowering the compulsory school age to 5 and establishing universal access to free, full-day Kindergarten. The study would quantify the long-term impact of starting school at an earlier age and identify benefits and challenges of implementation for school districts, families, and employers.

Lastly, Pennsylvania needs to provide competitive wages to attract and retain qualified education professionals. An outdated state statute sets compensation for Pennsylvania teachers and other education professionals, including counselors and school nurses, at a minimum \$18,500 per year. The Governor's 2019-20 Budget proposes to increase the minimum starting salary to \$45,000 per year to better align with competitive salaries and the increased cost of living.

Higher Education

The Governor's 2019-20 Proposed Budget focuses on workforce needs for skilled workers in high-demand industries by investing in targeted opportunities, including a focus on non-traditional students.

The proposed budget also builds on successful investments in PAsmart. Over the next decade, seven in ten new jobs in Pennsylvania will require computer science skills. This year PDE awarded nearly \$20 million in PAsmart targeted and advancing grants to local education agencies to increase access to computer science and STEM education for K-12 students statewide. The 2019-20 Proposed Budget will continue these efforts as well as invest an additional \$10 million in career and technical education (CTE) and job training for working-age adults. The proposal includes a \$4 million increase in the Pennsylvania Manufacturing to Career Training Grant program – nearly doubling the Commonwealth's current investment – for companies to identify and train a skilled workforce while creating a workplace culture that promotes employee advancement and employer growth. An additional \$6 million will be used to

develop and expand adult CTE training programs that target workers and non-traditional students with career readiness, basic education, and remedial assistance. Priority will be placed on innovative training models that prioritize timely completion, provide qualified CTE instructors, and lead to industry recognized credentials.

The Governor's proposal further targets the middle-skills gap by investing \$8 million through PA Community College Tuition Assistance to create the Educate and Stay in PA Program. The program will award one-time \$2,500 grants to Pennsylvania community college students and graduates who earn an associates degree or industry-recognized credential and continue to work and live in Pennsylvania.

The budget proposal also includes a \$7 million increase for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. This 1.5 percent increase allows the system and its 14 state universities to continue to focus on aligning its policy priorities and operations for student affordability and success.

Collectively, these investments support the Governor's goal of 60 percent of Pennsylvania residents having some form of postsecondary degree by 2025 and ensure Pennsylvanians are prepared for current and future workforce demands.

Libraries

The Governor's 2019-20 Proposed Budget sustains Pennsylvania's investment in the public library subsidy at \$54.4 million, the primary state funding source for local libraries.

Pennsylvania libraries are community centers providing opportunities for learning 21st Century skills and literacies, connecting people to the world of information and ideas, and creating spaces for innovation and community dialogue. Serving as a primary provider of broadband access, especially in low-income and rural communities, the Commonwealth's public libraries are central to efforts to promote connectedness, innovation, and career readiness. The statewide network includes 604 state-aided community-based public library locations that serve approximately 59 million people annually (in-person and virtually.) The public library system includes 5.2 million library card holders. Last year, more than 300,000 children participated in library summer learning programs.

In addition to serving as an important partner to early learning programs, and improving literacy and academic success, more than 290 public libraries provide STEM-related learning experiences and Maker Spaces. Pennsylvania also is a national leader in promoting family and community engagement through public libraries, connecting young learners and families with important community-based resources.

Pennsylvania's unemployed and under-employed turn to the public library every day for help. More than 70 percent of Pennsylvania's public libraries provide resources and supports to job seekers, including career navigation, research, and other services. Nearly a third offer digital equipment, including loaner laptops and mobile hotspots. These programs supplement other community-based resources to assist individuals seeking employment opportunities to the resources and information they need, including PA CareerLinks.

Conclusion

Within the Governor's 2019-20 Proposed Budget the Pennsylvania Department of Education continues to focus on serving students and learners of all ages. The Governor's Budget is an all-inclusive package to address workforce development across agencies and sectors. The cross-sector collaboration highlighted in the budget proposal ensures an emphasis on the needs of early learners and non-traditional students in a way that closes the skills gap and ensures more workers qualify for and fill jobs with family-sustaining wages.

In the year ahead, I look forward to working with you to continue to achieve great things on behalf of the commonwealth's students, educators, families, and communities. Thank you for your commitment to making education a shared priority, and I will be happy to address any questions.