

# PA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BUDGET HEARING WRAP

## Tuesday, March 3, 2026



### **General Overview:**

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Secretary Dr. Carrie Rowe and senior PDE staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee today. House Republicans asked questions about the proposed PreK-12 spending increase, investments in career and technical education, accountability within grant programs, cell phone use in schools, and the planned closure of seven Penn State branch campuses.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- The Governor is proposing to spend \$18.92 billion in General Fund dollars for Fiscal Year 2026-27 on PreK-12 Education, an overall increase of \$884 million, or 4.4%, over the current fiscal year.
  - PreK-12 spending represents nearly 36% of the state budget.
  - Of the \$18.92 billion in PDE spending, approximately \$12 billion is within the Basic Education Funding, Special Education Funding, and Ready to Learn Block Grant line items, which drive out funds to school districts through statutory formulas.
- When asked by House Republicans about the 2023 Commonwealth Court ruling on school funding adequacy, Secretary Rowe would not say that it created a mandate for education spending. When later pressed, she acknowledged that she believes that “adequacy gap” funding, which is distributed through the Ready to Learn Block Grant, is constitutionally required and must be planned for.
  - It is notable that the Governor’s budget shows zero increase in adequacy funding in future years.
    - Secretary Rowe appeared to create a significant contradiction by claiming that only legally required spending is included in future year projections.
    - Not including adequacy gap funding in future years is, at best, dishonest budgeting.
  - The Governor’s budget proposal continues to address the “adequacy gap” as determined by the majority report of the Basic Education Funding Commission, but it does not offer a vision of what success looks like under this funding.
    - Secretary Rowe once again affirmed that there is not a direct correlation between increased education funding and improved test scores.
  - Members also shared concerns that rural school districts are receiving less than urban and suburban districts. Secretary Rowe acknowledged that some rural school districts do receive lower amounts of funding than other areas of the Commonwealth through the Ready to Learn Block Grant.
- House Republicans were informed that inspections are in place to prevent the type of childcare center fraud discovered in Minnesota in 2025.
- Members learned that plans to close Penn State branch campuses have not been fully submitted to PDE, but they continue to work toward a final plan to close or transition seven branch campuses.
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) is essential to growing our economy. Members pledged to support efforts to increase the availability and effectiveness of CTE programs.
- Cellphones in the classroom have become an issue facing all schools in Pennsylvania. Members shared their desire to see PDE engage with school districts to reduce cellphone use, especially among grade school students.
- Dual Enrollment programs offer students the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. Members learned that the current \$7 million program awarded funding to 15 out of 25 applicants.

**Notable Q&A:**



Rep. Jamie Barton asks PDE whether the 2023 Commonwealth Court case mandates that the Commonwealth spend more money on education.

Rep. Marla Brown asked why the Governor's budget does not include projected funding increases in future year budgets for the Ready to Learn Block Grant.



Rep. Jeff Olsommer questions why the Ready to Learn Block Grant program seems to favor urban over rural schools.

Rep. Ann Flood asked what protections are in place to ensure there is no fraud in Pennsylvania's PreK programs, as seen in Minnesota.



Rep. Kristin Marcell discusses waitlist issues for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Rep. Marci Mustello inquired regarding PDE's guardrails for Dual Enrollment grants.



Rep. Eric Davanzo pressed PDE to do more to stop cellphone use in schools.