



K-12 Education 2010 Elections

A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids A Voice for Kids

Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Why it Matters

One of the most important factors influencing the future success of any child is the quality of education received. But ensuring that all children have access to a high-quality education is not a one-sided responsibility that taxpayers must bear – rather it is a long-term investment that can lead to the prosperity of all Pennsylvanians. But just as important as the investments we make are the choices and strategies our educators make to foster academic growth of children, and how we ensure that our investments drive the results that kids need.

Children who have the advantage of rigorous schooling and develop knowledge, skills, creativity and determination will carry this Commonwealth and our nation forward as a leader in a global economy. Today's children are tomorrow's adults. They will eventually build the industries, develop life-saving medications, defend our country and create the jobs of tomorrow. As adults, they will establish public policy and help all of us decide who will lead this nation. Our future is their future; therefore we must prioritize their preparation for a complex world and a knowledge-based economy.

What Works

Our Commonwealth's recent experience shows us that the infusion of new resources into our classrooms such as those made available through the Accountability Block Grant (ABG) program and the new school funding formula can help drive positive student achievement.¹ We know student achievement has increased and more schools, nearly 78 percent, are meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind, which means our students are succeeding. But those dollars didn't come to districts as blank checks for school officials to do with as they please. While funds for public education have increased dramatically, those recent investments have been targeted toward research-backed strategies that are proven to increase student achievement and help students prepare for life beyond high school. How we spend money in public education, not just how much, matters.

In some cases such as ABG, school districts had a choice of what strategies they would use with new state dollars. In another, school districts that had students with the most need benefited by separate state investments aimed specifically at improving the achievement levels of their students. Such investments have increased the number of children in full-day kindergarten and pre-K classes, lowered class-size and extra help available to struggling students – all research-based strategies to increase students' achievement.

Our new school funding formula didn't abandon these research-based strategies or the principle of accountability for such historic funding increases. Portions of large increases to districts must be targeted to specific student needs. It's not just about more money. It's

about spending the right amount of money – often referred to as an adequacy target -- so all children, regardless of their zip code, have adequate resources to meet state academic standards. Requiring that those dollars are spent on the programs proven to drive Pennsylvania's student achievement creates even further gains.

While success can already be realized, we are far from achieving our goals. When student achievement is compared to the funding targets identified in the 2007 Costing-Out Study, one can see that Pennsylvania's strategic investments are making a difference. Districts that have received the most in targeted state resources for education since 2002 have seen an average increase of 37 percent in the proportion of students performing on grade level in reading and math.²

Any new investments, beyond what is necessary to meet the needs of students through the funding formula, should support the very people charged with fostering academic growth of students – Pennsylvania's teachers. We cultivate the knowledge and growth of Pennsylvania's education professionals through continuing education requirements, but such requirements do not adequately support first year education professionals. Teachers need to be able to do more than just *survive* their first year of teaching experience. They need to *thrive* by continuing to develop the skills that will make them effective teachers and foster the kind of student achievement that has made Pennsylvania a leader in recent years.

In a time of extreme economic hardship, we can't afford to simply throw state money around. We have to spend money deliberately and ensure that our investments are paying off in classrooms. Thus, to drive continued positive student outcomes and academic achievement in Pennsylvania's schools, the Commonwealth must make more resources available to public education – but those resources need to be targeted toward closing adequacy gaps, fostering student achievement, preparing students for college and/or careers and making sure educators are adequately prepared for the challenges they face in classrooms.

Where Are We Now

In recent years, Pennsylvania has achieved significant headway in student achievement. In fact the Center for Education Policy (CEP) reports that between 2002 and 2008, Pennsylvania was the only state in the nation to make comprehensive academic gains. Examining reading and math performance, CEP found in its report that Pennsylvania was the only state to:

- Reduce the percentage of students performing at the lowest achievement ranking;
- Increase the percentage of students who are at least on grade level; and
- Increase the percentage of students who are at the highest achievement level.³

Additionally, CEP found that Pennsylvania was one of only eight states with a moderate to large increase in the percentage of students performing on grade level in reading and math at the elementary, middle and high school levels.

State assessment scores also bear out the positive work students and schools are putting into meeting the academic requirements set forth by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Seventy-eight percent of Pennsylvania's public schools met adequate yearly progress in 2009. This is a 6 percent increase since 2008. Additionally, more than 72 percent of students are performing on grade level in reading and math.⁴

The success of Pennsylvania's students and schools coincides with Pennsylvania's investments in public education over the last six years that focus on providing resources for strategies proven to increase student achievement.

Adequate, equitable and accountable state funding for basic education: Until two years ago, Pennsylvania had the distinction of distributing funding to school districts based on data from 1991-- the last year an actual school funding formula was utilized. The remainder of the funds in the basic education subsidy are distributed to school districts based upon annual ad hoc decisions by the General Assembly. Not only was school district funding not based on current student enrollment, but it also did not recognize what it would cost to get all students to achieve proficiency in state academic standards or distribute the dollars in such a way that would provide the resources to school districts to reflect the additional cost of getting certain groups of students to proficiency.

In 2006, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring the State Board of Education to conduct a statewide Costing-Out study to determine the costs needed for all students to achieve the state's academic standards. The study, released in November 2007, concluded that school districts had a \$4.4 billion funding gap between what they currently spent (using 2005 data) and what it would cost to get all students to achieve proficiency. More specifically, 471 of then 501 school districts were spending below what it would take to ensure that 100 percent of students could reach proficiency. This meant that 1.67 million out of the Commonwealth's 1.8 million school-age children were attending schools that did not have enough resources to meet their academic needs.

School districts with the greatest funding gaps – at least \$3,000 per pupil – have one-third fewer students on grade level. In comparison, 81 percent of students performed on grade level in school districts that are investing at the target level established by the Costing-Out study.⁵

Fortunately, only seven months after the study was released, Pennsylvania achieved its single largest increase in basic education funding of \$275 million (at that point in time) and its first school funding formula in almost two decades. Moreover, the formula accounted for factors that actually increase the cost of providing an adequate public education -- student enrollment, district size, geographic price differences, poverty and English language learners. The formula also ensures that funding increases over a school's district Act 1 index are directed toward proven student achievement strategies.⁶ But most importantly, however, Act 61 of 2008 included language in the Public School Code establishing a goal to review and meet state funding targets by 2014. This goal was based upon the six-year plan, which established the state share of the funding adequacy gap as \$2.6 billion.

Even with a new formula that requires large investments to close the statewide adequacy gap, we still have a responsibility to ensure that the dollars provided to school districts are spent wisely and on the programs that will drive continued student success. The new

school funding formula doesn't simply throw vast amounts of new money at school districts. Rather it ensures that large increases in new dollars for schools are targeted for specific student achievement strategies. Without such a requirement, there is no way for the Commonwealth to ensure that districts are spending the money wisely on research-based strategies that will improve students' academic achievement.

In 2009, Pennsylvania utilized State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF) dollars from the federal government under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to backfill and supplement basic education funding. The Commonwealth cut the state appropriation for basic education by \$354 million and used SFSF funds to fill that funding gap. Districts also were provided with a \$300 million increase (again with SFSF dollars) in basic education subsidy and the Commonwealth once again utilized the school funding formula to drive those dollars out to school districts. Policymakers also responded to the concerns of rural school districts and adopted improvements to the formula that phase-in of funding distribution percentages to fund all districts more equitably during the remaining five-year implementation period and eliminate the negative impact of the geographic price adjustment on 233 school districts.⁷

Four years remain to meet the Commonwealth's goal of closing the statewide adequacy gap for our school districts. Fiscal challenges clearly await us as stimulus dollars expire. But the result of not meeting our statutory goal means that we fail to provide adequate resources to all students that will enable them to meet state academic standards.

Adequate, equitable and accountable state funding for special education: While the adoption of the basic education funding formula was certainly historic, it must be noted the formula does not extend to the education of children with special needs. Prior to 1991-92, the state reimbursed school districts for 100 percent of the "excess costs" of special education above the average cost per student for basic education.⁸ Since then and to this day, there is a limited amount of state dollars for general special education services in the state budget. For distribution purposes, the state assumes that all school districts have 16 percent of their student population needing special education and it provides minimum increases to reflect inflationary increases of expenses. In reality, the actual numbers of special education students vary from school district to school district with the degree of services needed varying from student to student.

Further complicating this fact is the accountability by the federal government for its mandate to provide special education services. The federal government has never met the threshold for special education funding that it has sought to meet since the early 1980's.

A more in-depth analysis of Pennsylvania's special education system by the same organization that performed the 2007 Costing-Out study found that the total statewide gap in annual funding for special education is \$380 million. To be clear, the special education adequacy gap is captured in the overall adequacy gap of \$4.4 billion identified by the 2007 Costing-Out study. However, funding to close the gap for special education is NOT included in the six-year plan that determined the state share of the overall adequacy gap to be \$2.6 billion. A total of 194,862 students with special needs attend 391 school districts that do not have the resources they need to provide a quality education to students with disabilities.⁹

College- and Career-Readiness and Success: While Pennsylvania has done a good job targeting resources toward student achievement, we know that we've done a poor job ensuring that graduates are prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education once they graduate from high school. In the 2008-09 school year, more than 40 percent of the students who graduated from high school did so without scoring proficient or above on the 11th grade PSSA or the 12th grade retake – a research-based measurement of students' proficiency in state academic standards. In addition, a recent student from Penn State's College of Education found that only 18 of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts appropriately measure whether their students can read and do math at the 11th grade level. College remediation rates are not very reassuring either. Research conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Education found that one in three recent Pennsylvania high school graduates who enrolls in a state-owned university or community college cannot pass a first-year college math or English course – costing parents, students and taxpayers more than \$26 million annually.

In this economy, students can't afford not to be prepared for postsecondary education and/or careers once they graduate from high school. And on the flip side, taxpayers can't afford to pay twice for students to be proficient in concepts they are supposed to know when they receive a diploma. Recognizing this fact, the State Board of Education responded to these concerns. In August, the Board adopted compromise regulations that would not only provide for a consistent assessment system for all school districts, while still balancing the Commonwealth's history of local control, but also provide students and educators with tools and supports that will help them achieve. Such tools and support include a guarantee of remediation for students who are not proficient in the academic standards; 10 end-of-course assessments for districts to utilize as determinants for graduation or for their own uses; diagnostics to help identify students at-risk of dropping out of school as early as 6th grade; voluntary model curriculum for teachers; and further technical assistance developing professional development, extended learning and remediation programs.

These requirements of these regulations and the tools that will be provided to students and educators to enable success will be provided gradually over the next six years. A multi-year contract to create the tests, tools, and supports requires annual state dollars in the budget. Without that sustained state support, students will fail to realize the guarantee that their diploma assures their readiness for college and beyond. Moreover, without the tools that the regulations provide for educators, more children will slip by without being identified as being at-risk of dropping out.

Again through prioritizing state resources for proven strategies that help students achieve, Pennsylvania was able to help students get a jump start on their college careers. Funding for dual enrollment programs provides high school students with the opportunity to take classes at local postsecondary institutions or in their local high schools for both high school and college credit. The program is widely popular with students. In 2008-09, there were \$28 million in requests for dual enrollment slots, 20 percent of which were from low-income students, yet there was only \$10 million available in funding. This meant that students were projected to receive only 36 percent of their requested funding to participate in the program. This reduced subsidy amount negatively impacts student participation, especially for lower-income students.¹⁰ Students are showing us that they want to be challenged and get a head start on their college endeavors. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has not responded to their clear demand for rigor as they prepare for postsecondary education.

Effective teachers: During the past several years, the State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) have taken important steps to improve both the quality and rigor of teacher preparation programs and the continuing professional education of current teachers. Through regulatory changes and new program guidelines, these changes should result in future teachers who are better prepared to teach children at different levels of development from pre-K through middle school, English language learners, and students with disabilities. They also should result in better literacy instruction in the earliest grades and better curricular content instruction in later elementary and middle school classes. The State Board of Education has updated the requirements on allowable professional development under Act 48 focusing on teachers' instructional needs for improved student achievement.

Even with these policy changes, Pennsylvania has not engaged in a comprehensive effort to ensure that once in classrooms, teachers are prepared for the challenges they will face. Research continually points to the benefits of high-quality teacher induction programs. In Pennsylvania, however, we clearly have work that needs to be done to strengthen our newest educators. The National Council for Teacher Quality recently gave Pennsylvania a grade of a D+ for its policies on teacher retention – teacher induction being one area of assessment. The report indicates that Pennsylvania “partly meets the goal” of effective induction, but only because we have a requirement for mentoring - and even that does not ensure the quality of professional mentoring within schools.¹¹

Even the Governor's Commission on Training America's Teachers recognized this fact in its final report in July 2006.¹² New teachers surveyed by the Commission in 2006 report that they are “not very well prepared” or “not at all prepared” to handle certain aspects of their jobs. For example, 38 percent of respondents reported classroom management, 52 percent having students demonstrating proficiency on tests, 32 percent identified differentiated instruction and 31 percent have concerns about using tests to improve instruction.¹³

Current regulations require that school districts submit a teacher induction plan as part of their strategic plans every six years to PDE. The programs are focused on first-year teachers, long-term substitutes and education specialists. While PDE has guidelines for induction programs' approval, there are only two requirements for all districts' induction programs. First, they must include mentoring; and second, activities must focus on teaching diverse learners in inclusive settings.¹⁴

The requirements for effective teacher induction are clearly lacking in Pennsylvania. If new teachers don't feel well-prepared to handle the challenges of their classrooms, how can they be effective? How can they foster students' success? Our one-year teacher induction program with limited requirements does not meet the needs of new teachers, and consequently, the needs of their students.

The Time is Now

In order to grow and sustain Pennsylvania students' achievement in coming years, we cannot abandon the strategies or investments which have led to our students' success. The Commonwealth must continue to prioritize sustained multi-year efforts that cement Pennsylvania's position as a national leader in student achievement. But at the same time,

we must also look to ensure that the people charged with cultivating students' academic growth and tapping their potential have adequate supports in their early teaching experience. To accomplish these goals, Pennsylvania must:

Continue to maintain its commitment to the basic education funding formula and invest necessary resources to close the state share of the adequacy gap: It will take unprecedented funding increases for basic education to close the state share of the education funding adequacy gap. Section 2502.48 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code contains a goal for the Pennsylvania General Assembly to review and meet state funding targets by 2014. This means that the Commonwealth should invest \$2.1 billion in the basic education subsidy over the next four years and distribute those funds via the school funding formula. It is probably also inevitable that the responsibility to find the state resources to replace the SFSF dollars (from ARRA) used in the basic education subsidy during 2009 and 2010 will fall to the next Administration as stimulus dollars for education won't be available in 2011. The continued commitment to student achievement and fully funding the formula will allow school districts to plan program improvements that increase student achievement as achievement targets increase in accordance with the schedule established under No Child Left Behind.

It is also important to note that it will be necessary to evaluate our progress in ensuring that every child, regardless of his or her zip code, has access to the resources necessary to have every opportunity to be successful academically. Pennsylvania should establish a schedule to perform costing-out studies to calculate the progress in closing districts' adequacy gaps and confirm that Pennsylvania is or is not reaching the statutory goal.

Provide adequate funding for students with special needs: Comparatively, the funding gap for special education -- at \$380 million statewide -- is considerably smaller than the state share of the funding gap for basic education. There is no reason for this very select group of students to be left out of policy reform efforts aimed at assuring adequate resources, distributed in an equitable formula, so students can meet academic needs. Special education, like basic education, represents a partnership among local, state and federal governments. While it can certainly be argued that the federal government should step up its support for special education, and the possibility exists that much of this funding gap could be closing by new funding for IDEA, that doesn't negate the Commonwealth's responsibility when we are now able to quantify what Pennsylvania needs to improve special education financing. It is time for Pennsylvania to put services for special education on the same priority level as basic education and close the funding gap.

Enable college- and career-readiness and success: Pennsylvania should develop and implement a system of academic supports and a common-sense accountability system to ensure all students achieve as outlined in the State Board of Education's high school graduation requirements rulemaking. This includes providing adequate annual appropriations to implement the following:

- Voluntary model curricula that is aligned to the state academic standards;
- Computer-based diagnostic tools to help teachers identify students who are struggling early (no later than sixth-grade), and determine why they are struggling;

- Mandatory supplemental instruction for students who do not demonstrate proficiency of the state academic standards;
- Aligned Keystone end-of-course assessments in English literature, English composition, Geometry, Algebra I and II, Biology, Chemistry, U.S. History, World History, and Civics/government.

The Commonwealth should also expand dual enrollment opportunities so that every student who wants to participate can do so, regardless of ability to pay. Dual enrollment funding needs to be increased to better align with the requests. In addition, the set-aside for low income students should be increased from 22 percent to 25 percent of the total allocation.

Foster effective teachers: Pennsylvania must build upon its efforts to improve the effectiveness of new teachers by focusing on the supports needed by first-year teachers when they enter classrooms. There is growing evidence that high-quality teacher induction can improve teacher retention and student learning.¹⁵ Pennsylvania should expand the required one-year induction program to two years with standard requirements for all induction programs statewide. Specific requirements for programs should include high-quality mentoring, release time for observation for both mentors and novices, evaluation of both mentors and new teachers by each other, and targeted professional development opportunities to address the concerns of new teachers, including assessment, differentiated instruction and classroom management.

Pennsylvania's next governor has an unprecedented opportunity build upon the student achievement gains Pennsylvania has achieved. And he or she will do so as the nation comes up against the deadline under No Child Left Behind for all students to be proficient. Now is the time for Pennsylvania to sustain and increase its leadership in the area of academic gains for children.

¹ The Accountability Block Grant (ABG) Program provides financial assistance to school districts to implement effective educational practices and initiatives to attain and improve academic performance targets. School districts have a menu of options to choose from when deciding where to commit ABG funds. In the 2009-10 state budget, \$271.425 million was appropriated for the program – the same amount that was provided in the 2008-09 state budget.

² Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education.

³ Center on Education Policy. "State Test Score Trends Through 2007-08, Part 1: Is the Emphasis on "Proficiency" Shortchanging Higher- and Lower-Achieving Students?" June 2009.

⁴ Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education.

⁵ Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education.

⁶ The term "Act 1 index" refers to the measure of inflation required by Act 1 of the Special Session of 2006 and used by Pennsylvania's school districts to measure their maximum property tax increase without seeking voter approval or gaining approved exceptions under the statute.

⁷ The Act 50 formula utilizes a geographic price adjustment (also referred to as the location cost metric) to measure price differences in different regions of Pennsylvania, but in no case is the geographic price adjustment less than one for any school district. This is different from the original Act 61 formula.

⁸ The term, "excess costs," refers to the expenses associated with providing special education services above the base cost of providing a regular education to any child.

⁹ Costing Out the Resources Needed to Meet Pennsylvania's Education Goals for Students with Disabilities. Augenblick, Palaich and Associates. February 2009. Page 2.

¹⁰ The Pennsylvania Department of Education; Dual Enrollment 2007-2008 Final Report

¹¹ National Council on Teacher Quality. "State Teacher Policy Yearbook: What States Can Do to Retain Effective Teachers." June 2009. Page 73.

¹² In 2005, Governor Rendell created the Governor's Commission on Training America's teachers via an executive order to examine the continued growth and vitality of Pennsylvania's teacher education system. Comprised of education professionals from higher education, basic education, the legislature and the administration, among others, the Commission provided recommendations to the General Assembly for improving teacher quality and preparation in July 2006.

¹³ Governor's Commission on Training America's Teachers. "Investing in Great Teachers for All Students." July 2006. Page 39.

¹⁴ 22 Pa. Code § 4.13 and 49.16.

¹⁵ American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "Teacher Induction Programs: Trends and Opportunities." October 2006. Page 2.