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STATE UPDATE

House Vote: Increase Basic Education Spending but Cut Child Care

In a good news-bad news scenario, the state House passed a 2011-12 state budget plan that would roll back Gov. Corbett's proposed cuts to basic education and full-day kindergarten but slash \$40 million from the subsidy that provides quality child care for working families.

House Bill 1485 passed the Republican-controlled chamber on a largely party-line vote, 109-92.

Negotiations leading to the June 30 deadline for passage of a 2011-12 state budget will determine whether spending stays at Corbett's proposed \$27.3 billion – also the total proposed in HB 1485– or rises with help from an accumulating surplus of nearly \$540 million this fiscal year and another half-million projected next year.

Corbett has proposed eliminating the Accountability Block Grant program, which funds two-thirds of Pennsylvania's full-day kindergarten slots, but HB 1485 would restore \$100 million to the funding pool that school districts can use for the program. Speaker of the House Sam Smith (R-Jefferson), an original architect of the ABG, argued that the \$100 million for ABG is "a floor, not a ceiling" for budget negotiations and hinted that total state spending could exceed \$27.3 billion. To ask your State Senators to be SUPERHEROES and restore more money to ABG – [CLICK HERE!](#)

The House GOP's spending plan would also restore \$100 million to the basic education subsidy and \$385 million of the proposed \$650 million cut for higher education.

With restorations to education, welfare spending was reduced in order to keep the total spend number in HB 1485 to \$27.3 billion. In total, HB 1485 cuts \$471 million from the Department of Public Welfare's (DPW's) budget with \$158 million of that money coming from projected reductions in waste, fraud and abuse. The proposal would also reduce child care

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by nearly \$40 million and county child welfare funding by an additional \$21 million from what was proposed by Gov. Corbett.

Senate Minority Leader Dominic Pileggi (D-Delaware) also cited those refill amounts as “a floor” for these negotiations and called for dipping into surplus revenue.

However, House Majority Leader Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny) said that the state should save surplus funds to cover rising pension costs, unemployment compensation debt or other future obligations.



PASBO/PASA Survey: Revenue Woes Undermine Academic Gains

Pennsylvania’s academic gains, prompted in large part by improvements in the adequacy and equity of school funding, are threatened as school districts plan huge cuts to fill budget holes, according to a new survey from the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) and the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO).

The possibility of up to \$1 billion in state cuts – part of a “convergence of declining state, local and federal revenues to schools” – only exacerbate the situation, according to the PASA/PASBO report.

Pennsylvania was the only state reviewed by the Center on Education Policy that consistently made academic gains in reading and math at all levels from 2002 through 2008. Statewide, the rate of schools achieving adequate yearly progress jumped from 62 percent in 2005 to 95 percent in 2010.

However, proposed state funding cuts and the withdrawal of federal stimulus funds combine to threaten students’ academic progress. The PASA/PASBO survey found that:

- *71 percent of districts responding expect to cut instructional programs in 2011-12.*
- *Two-thirds of districts plan to lay off instructional staff, and 70 percent will lay off non-instructional personnel.*
- *Class sizes will increase in 86 percent of districts due to teacher layoffs.*
- *71 percent of districts will cut elective courses, 64 percent will eliminate tutoring, and 51 percent will drop summer school.*

“All-day kindergarten is endangered as well,” the associations reported. “Thirty-one percent of districts plan on cutting this key building block of school success for next year.”

Find the report by [CLICKING HERE](#).



Urban Educators Say Minority and Low-income Children Suffer Most from School Cuts

Proposed cuts in state education funding are discriminatory and disproportionately hurt minority and low-income children, members of the Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools and the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus said in May.

Educators and lawmakers were reacting to the Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign's finding that Pennsylvania students would experience cuts averaging \$623 each under Gov. Corbett's proposed budget – \$493 per Caucasian student, compared to \$819 per low-income student, \$867 per Hispanic student, and \$1,091 per African American student.



An alternative budget adopted by the state House would lower the average cut per student but widen the disparities when comparing Caucasian students to African Americans, Hispanics, and low-income students.

“These drastic cuts in our state investment in education, especially when low-income and minority students are hurt the most and are not going to yield more students graduating high school ready for college and the workplace,” said Pedro Rivera, superintendent of the School District of Lancaster.

The disparities are “not an example of shared sacrifice,” said a statement from the PLBC.

“This is an example of bait and switch, as some children will be forced to sacrifice more than others,” PLBC members said. “The leaders of the commonwealth have a responsibility to provide an opportunity to learn to all children; disproportionate cuts are antithetical to democracy and decency.”

From 2002 to 2010, African American and Hispanic students have narrowed the achievement gap by double digits, but “drastic and inequitable cuts” could slow or reverse that progress, said Bill King, superintendent of the Scranton School District.

“These cuts are especially inappropriate when these students have been making strong academic progress with adequate investment in their education and there is a budget surplus of over \$500 million,” King said.

House Panel Passes Bill Extending Pre-K Teacher Certification Timeline

Lead teachers in Pre-K Counts would get a one-year extension on the state's certification deadline, under a bill approved by the House Education Committee.

HB 1407, sponsored by Rep. Paul Clymer (R-Bucks), was meant to ease pressure on early childhood teachers by extending the early childhood education certification requirement deadline from its current Dec. 31, 2011, to the end of 2015. But the House Education Committee rolled back the bill's deadline to Dec. 31, 2012 as the Early Childhood Coalition presented the members with data from OCDEL, which show that only 3 percent of lead teachers in Pre-K Counts are having trouble meeting the original deadline.

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State Board of Education OKs Alternative Teacher Certification Program Resolution

Alternative teacher certification programs must meet standards of rigor, quality, and demonstrated need, according to a resolution approved by the State Board of Education May 18.

The resolution, first approved by the Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Committee, said that pilot programs of the Pittsburgh School District and the New Teacher Project set “important standards for consideration of subsequent requests from national organizations seeking the ability to recommend candidates via alternative pathways.”

Alternative teacher certification programs should meet policy goals of attracting mid-career professionals, filling hard-to-staff positions, and increasing the quality and diversity of applicants for jobs in Pennsylvania school districts, the resolution stated.

HB 1407 would also establish a committee to review Pennsylvania’s early childhood education system for appropriate departmental oversight, paperwork duplication, access by at-risk children, funding equity, co-pay consistency, and use of co-pays to increase access. Panel members – program operators, association representatives, and DPW and PDE personnel – would consult with academics and child advocates. The panel would report its findings to the House and Senate Education committees and others with early childhood education oversight by Feb. 1, 2012.

The Early Childhood Coalition, of which PA Partnerships for Children is a member, provided comments to the committee outlining concerns about the composition of the workgroup. As currently drafted, the bill provides that only individuals and organizations that have a financial business interest in the operations of these programs and state employees would participate in the workgroup. The Coalition believes that the workgroup should include members that would bring an independent view of the best interests of children as the group reviews Pennsylvania’s early childhood education system.

The bill is awaiting consideration by the full House.

Senate Bill to Expand Abuse Reporting Requirements Gets Committee OK

The threshold for reporting and investigating possible child abuse by school employees would widen, under a bill approved by the Senate Aging and Youth Committee.

SB 549, sponsored by Sen. Wayne D. Fontana (D-Allegheny), would require reporting of possible abuse by school employees when “serious physical injury” to the child is suspected. That standard would strengthen current law, which mandates reporting in cases of “serious bodily injury” which causes “a substantial risk of death or which causes serious permanent disfigurement or protracted loss or impairment of function of any bodily member or organ.”

“Child abuse doesn’t always rise to the level where there is risk of death or permanent disfigurement,” said PPC President and CEO Joan L. Benso in a letter to committee members.

The stricter threshold would apply to cases in which the injury would cause the child severe pain or “significantly impair a child’s physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently,” Benso said. “The addition of this threshold is appropriate public policy to ensure that Pennsylvania’s laws governing child abuse by school employees actually reflect all physical forms of child abuse.”

Under the measure, the Secretary of Education and employers of child care service employees, school administrators or employees, and service

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CHIP Enrollment

CHIP enrollment was up, at 194,291, in May. This was the second consecutive month that CHIP enrollment rose. There were 14,421 children enrolled in CHIP who would not have been eligible prior to the Cover All Kids expansion.

Revenue Update

Pennsylvania collected \$1.8 billion in General Fund revenue in May, which was \$33.9 million, or 1.9 percent, more than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$24.3 billion, which is \$539.4 million, or 2.3 percent, above estimate.

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providers would also be notified when the Department of Public Welfare determines a founded or indicated report of child abuse on an employee. Notice related to an employee's suitability to the workplace and to the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the children in the employee's workplace would close a long-standing loophole that assures all appropriate parties responsible for the welfare of children are appropriately informed of reports of child abuse.



Military Retirees: Quality ECE Boosts Prospects of Future Recruits

Quality early childhood education for more children would help Pittsburgh alleviate the grim finding that 90 percent of its youth are unfit for military service, according to a report from Mission: Readiness.

The Washington-based consortium of military retirees and nonprofits found that poor academic performance, obesity, asthma and other health problems, criminal records, and drug addiction render 25,000 Pittsburgh men and women ages 18 to 24 unfit for military service.

Nationwide, the same problems disqualify about three-fourths of potential recruits, the Pentagon has reported.

Quality early education can fend off future problems and prepare students for success in school and career, the report noted. But according to the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, about 45 percent of Pittsburgh's young children aren't served by early education programs.

"We need to put some money into those early childhood development programs," said retired Air Force Col. Edmund Effort. "Education is going to be a salvation. We need to invest in these kids because we'll see the results later in our military."

Pennsylvania Still Falling Short on Children's Dental Health

Pennsylvania slightly raised its grade for assuring dental services to low-income children from an F to a D, according to the Pew Center on the States.

Among its findings, the Pew Center's annual report card noted that Pennsylvania was one



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of seven states that fell short of the national average in Medicaid-enrolled children who get dental services – 37.3 percent in Pennsylvania, compared to 38 percent nationwide.

Pennsylvania's overall grade rose because Medicaid now reimburses dentists for early preventive services. Pennsylvania also got credit for allowing hygienists to place sealants without a dentist's prior exam and for tracking data on children's dental health. However, the state fell short on four other benchmarks:

- *Share of high-risk schools with dental-sealant programs is below 25 percent.*
- *54 percent of residents live in communities with fluoridated water supplies, compared to 75 percent nationally.*
- *Medicaid reimburses 49 percent of dentists' median retail fees, compared to the national average of 60 percent.*
- *Pennsylvania hasn't authorized primary care dental providers, similar to nurse practitioners.*

Find the report and [PENNSYLVANIA FACT SHEET HERE](#).

FEDERAL UPDATE

U.S. Senate Rejects Budget Containing Medicaid Block Grant

The U.S. Senate voted down a federal FY 2012 budget plan from House Budget Committee Chair Paul Ryan (R-WI) that would have turned Medicaid into a block grant for states.

The House had passed the same measure, meant to trim \$5.8 trillion in federal spending over the next decade. The plan would have cut Medicaid spending and turned the program into a block grant, letting states spend Medicaid dollars – meant for children, low-income people, the elderly, and disabled – as they see fit.

The Senate's 40-57 rejection included opposing votes from most Democrats – Pennsylvania's Bob Casey among them – and five Republicans.

The Senate also unanimously rejected a budget proposed earlier this year by President Obama. Republicans claimed the spending plan maintained a free-spending status quo, while the Democratic caucus united in opposing the measure because the president changed that original spending plan in April. Obama said the altered proposal would save \$400 billion in military spending, \$770 billion in non-security discretionary spending, and \$480 billion in Medicaid spending by slowing costs, allowing flexibility without block grants, and lowering prescription drug costs.

On the day of the Senate's budget-vote spree, the plan garnering the most votes – 42 in favor, but still not enough to win passage – came from Pennsylvania's Sen. Pat Toomey. The Republican said that his plan would balance the budget in 2020 and reduce the federal debt to about 52 percent of gross domestic product by 2021, down from 70 percent currently.

Like the Ryan budget resolution, Toomey proposed turning Medicaid into a block grant and significantly reducing its funding. His plan also would have cut nondefense discretionary programs,

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Debt Watch: U.S. Hits Ceiling While Biden Leads Talks

The U.S. hit its \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling – the maximum amount it can borrow in order to pay its bills – and the U.S. Treasury forestalled a default on loans by halting reinvestments in some pension plans.

Treasury’s move gives the U.S. until Aug. 2 to raise the debt ceiling and prevent a financial crisis, according to Obama Administration officials. A default would undermine U.S. Treasuries and drive up interest rates, making it harder for families and businesses to borrow money, economists say.

In Congress, Republicans and some Democrats insist that spending cuts to reduce future deficits must accompany any vote on debt-ceiling relief. Vice President Joseph Biden is negotiating that approach with a small group of congressional leaders. Both sides have expressed optimism about a compromise, but the outcome is uncertain.

including elementary and secondary education, by nearly \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years, and mandatory programs other than Social Security and Medicare by almost \$3.8 trillion. Another \$900 billion would have come from social safety net programs, such as food stamps.

House Subcommittee Vote Threatens Kids’ Health Coverage

About 14 million children could lose Medicaid or CHIP health coverage, under a bill approved by the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee.

The proposed State Flexibility Act (HR 1683) would repeal the health reform law’s Medicaid and CHIP eligibility and enrollment requirements for states, according to First Focus Campaign for Children.

The Congressional Budget Office said the bill would save the federal government money but significantly increase the number of uninsured Americans – and two out of three would be children.

The measure would cause half of all states to eliminate CHIP by 2016, and the rest would scale back coverage, according to First Focus. As a result, 1.7 million children would be uninsured or enrolled in new state exchanges.

“Children across the nation would be left with no coverage, or coverage that fails to come even close to matching the comprehensive benefits and affordable cost-sharing currently provided for children through CHIP,” said First Focus President Bruce Lesley.

Competition Re-opens for Education Innovation Grants

States will compete for funds to coordinate, improve access, and heighten standards of early childhood education through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, announced U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

All states can compete for a share of \$500 million to extend the availability and quality of early learning programs for low-income children, Duncan said. Nine states, including Pennsylvania, can also vie for another \$200 million to help improve K-12 academic performance through education innovations.

The Early Learning Challenge is meant to expand access for low-income children, align early education with K-12 systems, improve teacher training, and share best practices and strategies.

“Our goal is to transform from a patchwork of disconnected programs often of uneven quality and uneven access into a coordinated one that truly and consistently prepares our nation’s young people for success in school and life,” he said.

The U.S. Health and Human Services Department will also be involved, promoting healthy child development and family engagement in education.



Anniversary of Milestone Report Prompts Calls for Progress in Child Well-Being

In 1991, an eye-opening report on the plight of American children prompted federal lawmakers to change lives by creating the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and CHIP.

“Twenty years ago, our government lacked the ability and resources to evaluate the status of our nation’s families, preventing us from developing programs aimed at improving children’s well-being, from birth through adolescence,” said Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), chairman of the National Commission on Children. “Without the commission’s report, we would never have seen the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and CHIP – two programs that are very near and dear to my heart and essential to making sure that all children have a chance at a healthy start in life.”

But progress in child well-being has stalled “due to the lack of a comprehensive agenda around children,” reported First Focus Campaign for Children. One child in five is poor, 8 million children lack health insurance, and the overall share of federal, nondefense spending for children’s programs has dropped by 12 percent in five years.

Pennsylvania Sen. Bob Casey and U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) are proposing a National Council on Children to annually assess U.S. performance in ensuring child well-being and develop national goals and recommendations for improving the lives of children and youth.

“As we continue debating how to recover from the economic downturn, it is an opportune time to recognize the work of the National Commission and the need for a new national action plan for improving child well-being,” said First Focus President Bruce Lesley.



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