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TO: Ron Cowell, the Education Policy and Leadership Center

FROM: Jim Lee

RE: **Poll Highlights: PA Voters Reaffirm Strong Support for Public Education and Schools**

DATE: November 2011

Following are three general conclusions summarizing the key findings of the statewide poll.

I. Pennsylvanians Value Public Education as Vital to a Strong Economy

Pennsylvanians place a premium on the value of a quality public education, and believe a strong educational system is vital to the success of Pennsylvania's economy as well as to local communities. This support is broad-based and includes strong majorities of voters in all demographic groups irrespective of party affiliation, geography, educational background, political ideology or other factors. Consider the following points:

- Ninety-seven (97) percent agree with the statement: *"The well-being of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and our local communities is dependent upon having an educated citizenry"*.
- Ninety-five (95) percent agree with the statement: *"All students [in Pennsylvania] should be legally entitled to the opportunity to receive a quality education"*.
- Ninety-three (93) percent agree with statements that: *"high quality public schools are vital for the success of Pennsylvania's economy"*, and *"high quality public schools are vital for the success of my local community"*.
- Ninety-two (92) percent agree with the statement: *"High quality public schools are vital for creating successful citizens"*.
- Ninety (90) percent agree with the statement: *"Everyone benefits from high quality public schools"*.

II. Pennsylvanians Support Increased [State] Funding for Public Schools

Most voters express strong support for increasing state funding for public schools, even in light of difficult budget times and at the expense of cutting other state programs and/or raising some state taxes. In addition, this support for higher state funding trumps other issues competing for lawmakers' time and consideration in Harrisburg. Consider the following:

- From a list of seven issues, voters rate *“increasing state funding for and improving education”* as the second most important priority for both the Governor and State Legislature to concentrate on in Harrisburg (at 38%). Only job creation and improving the economy rated higher (at 62%). Furthermore, voters' support for improving education and increased funding even trumps reducing property taxes (25%), fixing roads, highways and bridges (22%) and reforming state government (26%), all of which have been the focus of much public policy debate in recent months.
- Eighty-eight (88) percent agree with the statement: *“State government has a responsibility to ensure adequate funding for all districts so that students in all areas of the state regardless of the wealth of their local school district have an opportunity to learn and succeed”*.
- Eighty-two (82) percent agree with the statement: *“The responsibility of state government to adequately fund school districts should be maintained in both good and poor economic times, even if it means lawmakers must make politically difficult decisions concerning additional state revenues and/or cuts to other state programs”*. This includes 76% of Republicans, 88% of Democrats and 79% of Independents.
- By a 62-23 margin, voters believe state government should take steps to increase state funding for poorer school districts as a way to reduce the state's funding disparity (with wealthier districts), even if it means less funding is available for increases to wealthier [districts] ones. This includes a majority of voters regardless of their residential setting including 68% in urban areas, 59% in the suburbs and 63% in rural parts of the state.
- By a 60-35 margin, voters oppose a \$900 million reduction in state funding for school districts in the recently-adopted State Budget for FY 2011-12, even after learning the cuts were included as a way to reduce state spending, help balance the budget and avoid the need to raise state taxes.
- By a 56-31 margin, voters would be *more likely* to vote for a candidate for the state legislature who supports increases in state funding for public education even if it means cuts in other state programs and services and/or raising state taxes (as opposed to a candidate who supports reducing state funding for public education in order to hold the line on state spending and avoid tax hikes).

III. Pennsylvanians Support More Choices for Parents within the Public School System (including Public Charter Schools), but Oppose Public Funds for Non-Public Schools

Pennsylvanians support maximizing choices for both parents and children within the public school system including public charter school, as well as other important options for children like arts education and opportunities to enroll in advanced placement courses, foreign language courses and college-level courses. However, most oppose the use of public funds for non-public schools. Consider the following:

- Eighty-four (84) percent agree with the statement: *“All K-12 students and their families should be able to choose to attend any public school for which the student is academically qualified in the district where they live.”*
- By a more than 2:1 (or 67-30) margin, voters **disagree** with the statement: *“Taxpayer funds should be used to support tuition for students attending non-public schools like religious or private schools.”* This includes 70% of Democrats and 61% of Republicans who disagree.
- Ninety-three (93) percent agree with the statement: *“Public school choice policies should ensure that all qualified public school students should have the opportunity to enroll in advanced placement courses, career and technical courses, arts courses, foreign language courses and, if they have completed high school graduation requirements, academically appropriate college courses.”*
- Eighty-one (81) percent agree with the statement: *“It is important that a comprehensive education for all K through 12 students include arts education, including visual art, music, theatre and dance.”*
- By a 53-35 margin, voters support the continued use of public charter schools as an option for parents and children within the public school system. This includes 57% of Republicans, 49% of Democrats, 60% of Independents and sixty percent or more of voters in both Philadelphia and Allegheny County where many public charter schools are operating.

Methodology: This poll was commissioned by The Education Policy and Leadership Center and conducted by Susquehanna Polling and Research. Completed interviews were conducted October 24 - 31, 2011 with 800 registered voters. Only voters with prior vote history in G10, G09, G08 and/or G07 were contacted, as well as new registrants since 2010. Interviews are randomly selected and conducted via telephone using the professionally-trained survey research staff from the Harrisburg telephone call center of Susquehanna Polling and Research. Interviews are closely monitored to ensure a representative sample of Pennsylvania’s electorate is achieved based on party affiliation, geography, gender, age and other demographics; results are sometimes statistically weighted.

The margin of error for a sample size of 800 interviews is +/-3.46% at the 95% confidence level.
