

Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign

Successful Schools...Successful Children...Successful Communities

800 North Third Street · Suite 408 · Harrisburg, PA 17102 · 717-260-9900 · www.paschoolfunding.org

June 11, 2012

The Honorable LEGISLATOR'S NAME
PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES/SENATE OF PENNSYLVANIA
CAPITOL BUILDING AND ROOM NUMBER
HOUSE/SENATE BOX XXXXX
Harrisburg, PA 17120-XXXX

Dear REPRESENTATIVE/SENATOR XXXXXXXXXXXX,

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign, representing more than 35 regional and statewide organizations, supports the direction taken thus far by the Senate and House of Representatives to improve the Governor's proposed budget for K-12 education for 2012-2013.

We support your decision to maintain **separate funding of the Basic Education Subsidy, and to honor the formulas in place for the calculation of each school district's payments for the Pupil Transportation, Charter and Non-Public Transportation, and for School Employees' Social Security.** We urge you to continue your support for the current formula-driven funding of these separate appropriations and the rejection of the proposed Student Achievement Education Block Grant.

We support the decision of the House to **restore \$100 million for the Accountability Block Grant, a program funded with \$250 million only two years ago.** This program which truly provides flexibility for school districts is used to fund full-day kindergarten, tutoring, and other programs proven to increase student achievement.

But the Accountability Block Grant funding should not come at the expense of the Senate's recognition of the needs of the state's most severely financially distressed districts. The more than \$800 million decrease last year in funding to school districts most severely impacted the state's poorest districts, and that action by the General Assembly contributed greatly to their current financial distress. **The restoration of \$50 million proposed by the Senate-approved budget is the responsible reply to the crisis facing the most severely distressed districts.**

While there should be no moratorium on the state sharing responsibility for necessary school construction, we support at least the decision of the House to direct the Department of Education to **continue processing and paying for, in a timely fashion, school construction projects which school districts across the Commonwealth have already undertaken** with the assumption, based on current law, that the state would participate in the repayment of the construction costs.

We also understand that the House of Representatives and the Senate may be considering school code legislation designed to address the inequities that exist in the funding of charter and cyber charter schools. **This is a significant opportunity to save funds for school districts that have suffered from the loss of the state's \$224 million partial reimbursement for charter school expenses, without costing the state any additional funding. And to do so in a way that assures fair use of taxpayer funds.**

Perhaps the most egregious inequity that exists in the funding of charter and cyber charter schools is the treatment of pension costs in the current calculation of students' tuition rates. The charter school tuition formula has a loophole that results in charter and cyber charter schools collecting money for pension costs twice. Even though a school district receives 50 percent pension reimbursement from the state, the full cost of a school district's pension costs is included in the calculation in determining funding paid to charter and cyber charter schools. Charters and cyber charter schools also collect a 50 percent pension reimbursement from the state, essentially a double dip. **Ending this double-dipping would save districts hundreds of millions of taxpayer funds over the next several years.**

The Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign supports eliminating the double dip as well as limiting the charges to school districts for students in Charter and Cyber Charter schools to reflect the actual cost of providing instruction. Charter schools and cyber charter schools are recognized as viable options for providing instruction to students. But the varied payments by different districts to charter schools are not related to the actual cost of the educational programs at the charter schools. This is particularly true when it relates to cyber charter schools and students with special needs. The current formula is not sensitive to the services provided or the actual costs incurred.

As in all years, resources to support the state budget are not unlimited. But because it is a constitutionally-mandated responsibility, the General Assembly has a special obligation to the public school system of the Commonwealth and its students.

We support your efforts to restore important state funding to support our students. We are available to discuss these issues with you. The children are our future and providing all students with the best educational opportunities is the only way to insure a bright future for them and for the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your consideration.

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FUNDING CAMPAIGN

Steering Committee Members

A+ Schools
AFT – Pennsylvania
Alliance for Approved Private Schools
Children's Coalition of the Lehigh Valley
Communities in Schools of Pennsylvania
Education Law Center
Education Voters Pennsylvania

Good Schools PA
Keystone State Education Coalition
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Alliance for Arts Education
Pennsylvania Art Education Association
Pennsylvania Association of Agricultural Educators
Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators
Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals
Pennsylvania Association of Federal Program Coordinators
Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education
Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials
Pennsylvania Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Pennsylvania League of Urban Schools
Pennsylvania PTA
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
Pennsylvania School Librarians Association
Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association
Pennsylvania State Conference of NAACP Branches: Education Committee
Pennsylvania State Education Association
Philadelphia Education Fund
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers Youth
Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia
The Consortium for Public Education
The Education Policy and Leadership Center