



PARTNERS POST

Our Schools • Our Communities • Our Future

Your Partners for Public Education Newsletter

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Pennsylvania must confront big budget shortfall



Next week, Gov. Tom Wolf will present a first look at his first state budget, and education is expected to be a top priority.

Balancing the 2015-16 spending plan will be no easy task. The state is facing a funding shortfall estimated at more than \$2 billion, due in large part to corporate tax cuts and accounting gimmicks used in last year's budget. Experts are calling it a structural deficit because incoming revenues are not enough to balance the same level of spending in next year's budget.

Lawmakers will have to work with the new governor to put the commonwealth on firmer fiscal ground and to reverse deep state funding cuts to public school classrooms.

A new survey from the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) and Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) underscores just how urgent it is for policymakers to find a solution to the school funding crisis. The survey reports that

74 percent of school districts have cut programs and 93 percent have cut staff since 2010-2011.

The governor has already put forth one idea to fund schools: a natural gas drilling tax, with the "lion's share" of the revenue going toward education. His proposal — called the Education Reinvestment Act — would go into effect in 2016.

"We can get Pennsylvania back on track, and we can start by passing a commonsense severance tax that will help fund our schools — an idea with bipartisan support," Gov. Wolf said. "The commonwealth ranks 45th in the nation in percentage of state funding for public education, and as a result, we have seen larger class sizes, fewer teachers, and vital program cuts... This is the right thing to do for our children and our economy and to move Pennsylvania forward.

Gov. Wolf also supports reforming corporate taxes, closing loopholes, and improving government operations to close the budget gap. He will lay out a more detailed vision during his March 3 budget address."

New requirements for parents volunteering in schools

Attention parents who volunteer at their children's schools. Pennsylvania's new Child Protective Services Law requires any unpaid, adult volunteer who has direct contact, routine interaction, or responsibility for the welfare of children in public schools to provide a series of background checks:

- A clearance statement from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services,
- A state police criminal history report, and
- A written statement that the volunteer has been a resident of Pennsylvania for the past 10 years and is not disqualified from service based upon criminal convictions.

Volunteers who have lived outside of Pennsylvania in the last 10 years will also have to obtain an FBI criminal history report.

The new requirements begin on July 1, 2015. Any current volunteers who have already obtained background checks must renew them within 36 months of the issue date. Find more information and links to obtain these background checks at www.partnersforpubliced.org.

Access to high-quality education builds a stronger Pa. economy

High-quality education is one of the best investments Pennsylvania can make in its future. It will create more economic opportunity for residents and do more to strengthen the state's overall economy than anything else.

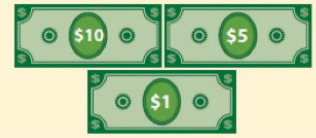
Studies have found that investments in high-quality early education provide a great rate of return to communities over the life of the child. Research also shows that student achievement improves when class sizes enable one-on-one interaction. By investing in quality K-12 public education, working to slow the growth of college tuition, and offering universal preschool programs, Pennsylvania can increase the educational attainment — and economic opportunity — of its population.

Partners for Public Education lays out why investing in education at all levels is our best bet for putting every student on track toward a great future. Learn more at www.partnersforpubliced.org.

For every \$1 a state spends on early childhood education



\$8 to \$16 is returned to the community.



High-stakes tests harm students, teacher testifies

High-stakes tests like Pennsylvania's Keystone Exams are harming students, Cumberland Valley seventh-grade teacher Jake Miller recently testified before the Pennsylvania House Education Committee, which is considering legislation to eliminate the Keystones as a graduation requirement. Miller and other education professionals endorsed the bill.

High-stakes tests like the Keystones are harming students, Miller said. Those who fail the test must take remedial courses so they can retake the tests, causing them to miss out on elective courses in art, technology, agriculture, and engineering.

"There is no need to put these students through the stress of high-stakes exams, and there is no need for school districts to waste precious financial resources on remediation for students who may simply have trouble taking tests, had a bad day, or were distracted by something going on in their lives," Miller testified.

Learn more about the Keystones at www.partnersforpubliced.org.



Friday Photo: Students go to the United Nations

Every Friday, Partners for Public Education shares a photo on Facebook showcasing interesting and innovative student learning in Pennsylvania schools. Like Partners Facebook Page at www.facebook.com/PartnersForPublicEd to see what it's all about. In this photo, two East Stroudsburg High School South students went to the United Nations in Manhattan to participate in an interactive discussion with 500 young people from across the globe.

Partner Benefits: Want to get away?

Have travel plans? Partners can take advantage of big discounts and savings from journey to destination. Through your **Partner Benefits**, you'll find savings on car rentals, airlines, and hotels nationwide. Visit the **Partner Benefits** page to sign in to Access and take advantage of all of the discounts and savings available to you as a Partner for Public Education.



About Partners for Public Education

Partners for Public Education is working to provide you with resources about public education in Pennsylvania because we are committed to the success of every child. It is brought to you by the *Pennsylvania State Education Association*, an organization made up of the dedicated employees in your Pennsylvania public schools.

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