

public citizens for children + youth

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Reaction to Gov. Wolf's 2019 Budget Speech

Governor's proposal a good start--Pennsylvanians now counting on legislators to finish the job and deliver the budget children and families need

Pennsylvania voters are clear that their top priority is education. Governor Wolf was re-elected last year to build on the progress made in his first term and we are pleased to see that funding our schools remains a top focus.

"[Pennsylvania's children] deserve to enter a public school system that isn't just adequate, but world-class," said Governor Wolf. "We must continue to increase funding for education—starting with pre-K and culminating at the end of a student's journey."

The Governor's budget proposal adds nearly half a billion dollars in new funds for services to children from early childhood to college.

Early Childhood Proposals

The clearest policy wins for kids is the robust early childhood education proposals advanced by the Governor, including a \$50 million increase in funding for high quality pre-K offered by child care providers, school districts, or the Head Start programs across the state.

While the state does not provide more funds for child care, the budget proposal includes just shy of \$100 million in new child care spending supported by federal funds. These funds lift working families and also help our children reach critical child development benchmarks that are proven to boost early school success.

The budget also adds \$15 million to the Early Intervention program that helps infants and toddlers who show early signs of development delays. The payoff of these early childhood investments is well documented and shows that the Governor is committed to helping children thrive early in life so they can need fewer public supports later in life.



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For young families who are struggling to care for babies and toddlers, this Governor's budget is essentially flat funded in regards to child care. Fortunately, federal increases in child care funds can help more families get access to affordable child care. We urge the legislature and the administration to target these new federal funds in ways that boost the quality of care so parents can go to work knowing their children are in programs that promote healthy child development.

Public School Proposals

There are some strong wins for kids with respect to k-12 education, as well. A promising \$10 million increase in state funding for career and technical education is likely to have strong bi-partisan support--that's a good thing for our high school students.

Likewise, the substantial increase of \$50 million for special education funding is worthy of attracting support from many legislative champions. However, federal and state mandates on school districts for special education have meant that districts spent \$1.4 billion more in services for special needs children than the combined value of the state and federal funds available to back this mandate in the last 8 years.

In fact, the PA Association of School Business Officials released a report last month that showed the mandated school district costs for special education, pensions, and charter school tuition increased by \$4 billion between 2011 and 2017, while state funding during that time increased by just \$2 billion.

Admittedly, it's a challenge to cheer for funding increases when districts face such a staggering shortfall.

The PA Schools Work Campaign, of which PCCY is a member, asked the Governor to add \$100 million to the state's funding for special education. We believe that the legislature must find an additional \$50 million to ensure special needs children are appropriately educated.

Our biggest challenge for kids is boosting funds for our poorest school districts across the state. Here the Governor's proposal is far less ambitious than is needed. The Governor's proposed \$168 million to flow through the new basic education funding formula for our schools is a good start. But experts find that Pennsylvania school districts need \$3 billion in new funding to meet the needs of every student in the state. For this reason, we urge the legislature to increase basic education funding for schools by an additional \$220 million above the Governor's proposal so they can make a serious down payment toward finally curing Pennsylvania's school equity problem.

Pennsylvania's historically anemic investments in schools have also caused property tax rates to be highest in our poorest communities. We urge the legislature to recognize that it must increase funding for schools as a strategy to stem the pace of property tax increases and to find ways to relieve hard hit households from crushingly high property tax bills.

We are also pleased to see a substantial funding increase of \$37 million for services for children who are abused and/or neglected and small increases in the state's maternal and child health services and newborn screening funds.

This budget season, we will continue to visit with legislators with engaged parents, educators and advocates to ensure the Commonwealth does not miss out on these opportunities to get our schools on the right path and to prepare our youngest learners for a lifetime of success.

Donna Cooper, Executive Director
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