

December 6, 2016

TO: Governor Wolf

FROM: The Arc Alliance
The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh/ACHIEVA
The Arc of Lehigh and Northampton Counties
The Arc of Pennsylvania
The Arc of Philadelphia
Autism Sharing and Parenting
Disability Rights Pennsylvania
Education Law Center
Education Rights Network
Juvenile Law Center
Local Special Education Task Force IU 20
Local Special Education Task Force IU 21
Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania
Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center (PEAL)
PARENT POWER
Parents Exchange
PEAC (Pennsylvania's Education for All Coalition)
Penn TASH
Pittsburgh Local Task Force on the Right to Education
Public Interest Law Center
Susan J. Agard; David J. Berney, Esq.; Nicole Cogdell; Ira M. Fingles,
Esq.; Steve Jacobson, Esq.; Yvonne M. Husic, Esquire; Hollie John, Esq.;
Dennis C. McAndrews, Esq., Kate McKelvey-Jones; Lorrie McKinley,
Esq., Nancy Ryan, Esq; Judith Silver, Ph.D.; Angela Uliana-Murphy

Re: **Funding for Special Education in FY 2017-2018 budget**

We are writing to you on behalf of parents, students, and community members across Pennsylvania to ask for your support to address the critical educational needs of students with disabilities.

We strongly urge you to propose \$100 million in special education funding to be distributed through the special education formula in your budget proposal for FY 17-18. Pennsylvania school districts desperately need new special education dollars to ensure that children with disabilities receive the high quality inclusive education they need and to which they are legally entitled. A 2009 study showed that there was a \$380 million funding gap for special education across the Commonwealth. A 2016 report issued by PASA/PASBO reports that 88% of Pennsylvania's school districts project an

increase in special education services this year.¹ While we thank you for your leadership in advocating successfully for \$50 million in increases over the past two fiscal years, the gap between adequate and actual special education funding continues to grow. Students with disabilities are some of Pennsylvania's most educationally at-risk children, and they need your support now.

We are calling on you to support additional funding for special education for the over 270,000 students with disabilities across Pennsylvania. Insufficient funding has resulted in an insufficient number of staff to support our students as well as deep cuts to critical resources and services that these students need to make educational progress.

Relatedly, funding deficits in basic education also impact students with disabilities. **We urge you to increase the state's basic education funding by \$400 million in next year's budget.** This investment will help close the almost \$3 billion basic education funding adequacy gap that plagues our schools and children. By using the bipartisan basic education funding formula to distribute the increased investment, dollars will be allocated based on actual district and student need. This investment is crucial because, as a result of past divestment and inequitable distribution of funding, students with disabilities are not receiving the education they deserve and to which they are legally entitled.

Finally, we hope you will join us in calling on the General Assembly to revisit the recommendations made by the 2014 bipartisan Special Education Funding Commission. All public schools serving children with disabilities, including charter schools, should receive tiered funding based on the needs of the students they serve.

Both additional resources and the equitable distribution of those resources are needed to ensure that students with disabilities in all public schools receive the appropriate supports and services they desperately need to be successful in school and beyond. We thank you for your continued commitment to education and investing in the future of Pennsylvania's children.

Thank you for your consideration.

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¹Continued Cuts: Losing Confidence, Losing Learning (June 2016) at p. 6 available at <http://www.pasa-net.org/Files/SurveysAndReports/2016/PASA-PASBOReportSpring2016.pdf>

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cc. Pedro A. Rivera, Secretary of Education
Randy Albright, Secretary of the Budget
Yesenia Bane, Special Assistant to the Governor