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Education Law Center Statement on PA's Proposed 2019-20 State Budget

Deborah Gordon Klehr, executive director of the Education Law Center, released the following statement today in response to the tentative budget agreement between legislative leaders and Gov. Wolf:

“The need for additional state education funding has been acute in literally hundreds of struggling school districts across the Commonwealth. Thus, the proposed increases in the budget agreement between Governor Wolf and legislative leaders are needed and welcomed, though insufficient.

“Over the past year, the Education Law Center (ELC) has drawn attention to [chronic deficiencies](#) in state support for special education, and the challenges that has created for local school districts. The proposed \$50 million increase (4.4%) in state special education funding is a bright spot in this budget plan, an important first step toward remedying a long history of inadequate funding for students with disabilities. The \$160 million proposed increase in basic education funding through the state’s funding formula, a modest 2.6%, is the largest increase since 2016. ELC welcomes the proposed increases for Pre-K Counts, Head Start, and Early Intervention, which will allow additional children to receive essential services.

“While we appreciate these steps forward, the state’s investment in education continues to fall far below what is needed to have an adequately and equitably funded public education system. And while the Pennsylvania legislature adopted a funding formula in 2016 that recognized the importance of distributing education aid on the basis of need, the proposed budget distributes barely one-tenth of basic education funding through the formula. Not enough aid is getting to the districts with the greatest need, and research has shown a disturbing statewide pattern that Pennsylvania districts with larger numbers of African American students receive fewer state education dollars.

“Even with these latest, needed budget increases, Pennsylvania’s schoolchildren continue to pay the price for the state’s inadequate and inequitable education funding system. It should be no surprise that so many children face critical understaffing, outdated materials, and crumbling buildings – or that fewer than 40% of adult Pennsylvanians have earned a college degree, below the national average.

“These troubling realities and entrenched inequities prompted a group of families, school districts, and statewide organizations to file a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Pennsylvania’s school funding system, which is expected to go to trial in Commonwealth Court next summer. But legislative leaders should not delay making the additional essential investments our children need now.”

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The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, trainings, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness. For more information, visit elc-pa.org.