

January 6, 2020

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  
Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools  
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 Partnerships & Parents Involved Network  
ONE PA  
Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center (PEAL)  
PARENT POWER  
Parents Exchange  
Parents United for Public Education  
PEAC (Pennsylvania's Education for All Coalition)  
Penn TASH  
Philadelphia HUNE  
Pittsburgh Local Task Force on the Right to Education  
Public Interest Law Center  
SPEAK Unlimited Inc.  
Vision for Equality  
Special Education Attorneys and Advocates:  
Susan J. Agard, Esq.; David J. Berney, Esq.; Ira M. Fingles,  
Esq.; Yvonne M. Husic, Esq.; Steve Jacobson, Esq.; Hollie  
John, Esq.; Elizabeth Kapo, Esq.; Dennis C. McAndrews, Esq.;  
Kate McKelvey-Jones; Lorrie McKinley, Esq.; Caryl Andrea  
Oberman, Esq.; Nancy Ryan, Esq.; Catherine Merino Reisman,  
Esq.; Judith Silver, Ph.D.; Frederick M. Stanczak, Esq.; Liliana  
Yazno-Bartle, Esq.

Re: **Education Funding for Students with Disabilities**

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

We thank you for your efforts in advocating successfully for a \$50 million increase in state special education funding increase for this budget year. While this increase is vitally important to providing necessary educational supports to students with disabilities, significant additional investment is needed to address the widening gap between adequate and actual special education funding. **We strongly urge you to propose \$100 million in special education funding to be distributed through the special education formula in your FY 20-21 budget proposal.**

Current state funding of special education is inadequate. Since 2008, local districts have borne roughly 90% of the increased costs of special education services, the equivalent of \$1.6 billion that local districts have had to make available through local taxes or other general education sources. Over this same period, the state share of special education funding has declined from roughly one-third to less than a quarter. Even with significant local funding increases, most districts still lack sufficient resources to ensure that students with disabilities are provided the services they are legally entitled to receive.

For the over 270,000 students with disabilities across Pennsylvania, the need for significant state investment in special education is urgent. **We strongly urge you to commit to restoring the state's share of special education funding back to its 2008-09 level of 32%.** This commitment will require significant ongoing investments in state funding for special education services. Such increases are needed to prevent the allocation of funding between state and local sources from becoming increasingly more inequitable and unsustainable and to ensure that children with disabilities receive the high-quality, inclusive education they need and to which they are legally entitled.

Inadequate special education 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 close the approximately \$4 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, due to past divestment and inequitable distribution of funding, students with disabilities—and their classmates across the Commonwealth—are not receiving an adequate or equitable education.

Finally, we hope you will join us in calling on the General Assembly to revise the state's special education funding system to more equitably distribute funding to districts to support students with disabilities. The formula should be [updated to more accurately account for district poverty](#). All public schools serving children with disabilities, including charter schools, also should receive tiered funding based on the needs of the students they serve. We thank you for your recent efforts to ensure that charter schools provide equitable access and inclusive opportunities for all students and look forward to working with you to ensure that addressing special education funding is part of upcoming charter reforms.

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.

**STATEWIDE & REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

**The Arc Alliance**, Paul Stengle, Chief Executive Officer

*Eagleville, PA 19403*

**The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh/ACHIEVA**, Nancy Murray, President

*Pittsburgh, PA 15203*

**The Arc of Lehigh and Northampton Counties**, Susan Kluge, B.S., Education Advocate

*Bethlehem, PA 18017*

**The Arc of Pennsylvania**, Maureen Cronin, Executive Director

*Harrisburg, PA 17101*

**The Arc of Philadelphia**, Joseph Mancini, Executive Director

*Philadelphia, PA 19140*

**Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools**, Lisa Haver & Karel Kilimnik, Co-Founders

*Philadelphia, PA 19144*

**Autism Sharing and Parenting**, Cathy Roccia-Meier, Vice President

*Philadelphia, PA 19144*

**Disability Rights Pennsylvania**, Peri Jude Radecic, Chief Executive Officer

*Harrisburg, PA 17101*

*Philadelphia, PA 19107*

*Pittsburgh, PA 15219*

**Education Law Center**, Deborah Gordon Klehr, Executive Director

*Philadelphia, PA 19103*

*Pittsburgh, PA 15219*

**Education Rights Network**, Paulette Foster, Co-Founder

*Pittsburgh, PA 15212*

**Juvenile Law Center**, Susan Mangold, Executive Director

*Philadelphia, PA 19103*

**Local Special Education Task Force IU 20**, Leslie McKelvey, Chairperson  
*Easton, PA 18045*

**Local Special Education Task Force IU 21**, Valerie Morton and Janitta Henry, Co-Chairs  
*Bethlehem, PA 18017*

**Mental Health Partnerships & Parents Involved Network (PIN)**, Lisa Snitzer, Director  
*Philadelphia, PA 19107*

**One PA**, Angel Gober, Organizing Director  
*Pittsburgh, PA 15212*

**Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership Center (PEAL)**, Jeannine H. Brinkley, Executive Director  
*Philadelphia, PA 19123*  
*Pittsburgh, PA 15203*

**PARENT POWER**, Cecelia Thompson, Director - Special Education  
*Philadelphia, PA 19132*

**Parents Exchange**, Ruth Landsman, Co-Founder  
*Philadelphia, PA 19118*

**Parents United for Public Education**, Sabra Townsend, Parent Leader  
*Philadelphia, PA 19146*

**PEAC (Pennsylvania's Education for All Coalition)**, Liliana Yazno-Bartle, Board President  
*Philadelphia, PA 19106*

**Penn TASH**, Ellen Tierney, Vice President  
*Pittsburgh, PA 15228*

**Philadelphia HUNE, Inc.**, Luz A. Hernandez, Executive Director  
*Philadelphia, PA 19133*

**Pittsburgh Local Task Force on the Right to Education**, Rachel Schlosser, Leah Altares, Valerie Allman, Co-Chairs  
*Pittsburgh, PA 15213*

**Public Interest Law Center**, Jennifer Clarke, Executive Director  
*Philadelphia, PA 19103*

**SPEAK Unlimited Inc.**, Susan F. Rzucidlo, Founder & Executive Director  
*Landenberg, PA 19350*

**Vision for Equality**, Audrey Coccia & Maureen Devaney, Co-Executive Directors  
*Philadelphia, PA 19106*

**Special Education Attorneys and Advocates**

**Susan J. Agard, Esq.**  
Attorney at Law  
*Philadelphia, PA 19102*

**David J. Berney, Esq.**  
Law Offices of David J. Berney  
*Philadelphia, PA 19103*

**Ira M. Fingles, Esq.**  
Hinkle, Fingles, Prior & Fischer, Attorneys at Law  
*Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462*

**Yvonne M. Husic, Esq.**  
Husic Law Office  
*Harrisburg, PA 17112*

**Steve Jacobson, Esq. and Hollie John, Esq.**  
Jacobson & John, LLP  
*Doylestown, PA 18901*

**Elizabeth Kapo, Esq.**  
Attorney at Law  
*Bethlehem, PA 18018*

**Dennis C. McAndrews, Esq.**  
McAndrews Law Firm  
*Berwyn, PA 19312*

**Kate McKelvey-Jones**  
Parent  
*Nazareth, PA 18064*

**Lorrie McKinley, Esq. and Nancy Ryan, Esq.**  
McKinley & Ryan, LLC  
*West Chester, PA 19382*

**Caryl Andrea Oberman, Esq. and Liliana Yazno-Bartle, Esq.**  
Law Offices of Caryl Andrea Oberman LLC

Willow Grove, PA 19090

**Catherine Merino Reisman, Esq.**

*Philadelphia, PA 19109*

**Judith Silver, Ph.D.**

*Philadelphia, PA 19104*

**Frederick M. Stanczak, Esq.**

Attorney at Law

*Doylestown, PA 18901*