

BUDGET BRIEF: 2020-21 PROPOSED GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

February 2020

Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed a budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year that includes increases for education. These increases are critical for children in Pennsylvania. But they will not be enough to provide children across the state with the resources they need to succeed in school.

What Does the Governor's Budget Propose?

Gov. Wolf has called for more education funding in several key areas of need. These include basic, special, and early childhood education as well as school facilities. Under the governor's budget, all 500 school districts in Pennsylvania would share in funding increases of:

- **\$100 million in basic education funding.** This is flexible funding that school districts can spend on textbooks, teacher salaries, and many other school needs. It also provides most of the state funding that K-12 public schools receive.
- **\$25 million in special education funding.** These funds are for districts to provide supports for students with disabilities.
- **\$30 million in early childhood education funding.** This funding would support pre-K and Head Start programs. The governor has also proposed an additional **\$11 million for early intervention programs** for children with development delays and disabilities. Together, these programs support children from birth to age five.

Gov. Wolf has also proposed **\$1 billion for school facilities.** This is new grant funding to address lead and asbestos in public schools. Currently, the only state funding school districts can use to maintain their buildings is basic education funding.

The increases in basic, special, and early childhood education funding that the governor has proposed are lower than in the past few years. But he has urged the legislature to change the way it funds charter schools so that more funding is available to school districts.

The governor's plan includes **\$280 million in charter savings.** School districts would save these dollars by lowering what they pay to cyber charter and charter schools to a fixed amount set by the state. Districts could then use these savings for other education needs. Including charter savings, the governor's plan would increase classroom funding by \$435 million.

Why Does This Matter?

The state budget reflects the state's priorities. How elected officials in Harrisburg divide up the state budget can provide children with opportunities that help them achieve in school. Or it can limit students' access to good schools and lower their educational outcomes.

Most schools in Pennsylvania urgently need more money to properly educate their students, so annual budget increases are important. How additional dollars are distributed is also important.

Districts with more [students in poverty are getting far less than they need](#) compared to other districts. Districts with higher rates of [students of color also get much less state funding](#) per student than whiter districts. This impacts student achievement. Pennsylvania has among the [biggest and most severe achievement gaps in the country](#) between white students and black and Latin(x) students.

If the proposed 2020-21 budget is approved, it will provide small increases in funding. But it will not resolve deep-rooted issues with Pennsylvania's funding system. This is because:

- **The proposed funding is not enough to meet the needs of Pennsylvania's students.** Funding in most areas would increase by 2% or less – but district costs are rising faster. Pennsylvania currently ranks 44th in the country in the share of school funding the state provides. Such small increases will not fix state underfunding.
- **The proposed budget does not address the funding gap between the neediest and richest, whitest districts.** The best tool we have to address inequities in school funding is the basic education funding formula. This is because it directs dollars to school districts based on student and district need. A \$100 million increase in funds going through the formula will not address Pennsylvania's significant funding and opportunity gaps; bigger, sustained funding increases through the formula are needed.

What Happens Next?

It is now up to the Pennsylvania House and Senate to decide whether to adopt the governor's proposed budget. The official deadline for the House and Senate to agree to a budget is June 30. It is possible that it could take them longer to pass a budget and for the governor to sign it.

The House and Senate may agree to the governor's numbers – or lower numbers, as they have often done in the past. Before the final budget, they will both hear from the Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education as well as from the public. **It is important that legislators hear that they need to adopt the full funding increases that the governor has proposed.** This is especially important because most of the new K-12 classroom funding would come from charter savings, and the House and Senate need to change the law before districts can receive those funds.

You can [contact your legislator](#) to help make sure Pennsylvania's public schools get what they need. [PA Schools Work](#) offers information and tips on how to be a school funding advocate for your school, your family, and your community.

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.

ELC's publications provide a general statement of the law. However, each situation is different. If questions remain about how the law applies to a particular situation, contact ELC's Helpline for information and advice - visit www.elc-pa.org/contact or call 215-238-6970 (Philadelphia) or 412-258-2120 (Pittsburgh) - or contact another attorney of your choice.