



**House Education Committee  
Informational Meeting  
Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes  
February 3, 2025, at 10am, 140 MC**

- 10:00am      Call to Order  
                 Committee Member Introductions  
                 Opening Remarks- Chairman Schweyer
- 10:10am      Panel 1- Department Perspective  
  
                 Dr. Carrie Rowe, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education  
                 Pennsylvania Department of Education
- 10:45am      Panel 2- School Perspective  
  
                 Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director  
                 Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators  
  
                 Dr. Dana Bedden, Superintendent  
                 Centennial School District  
  
                 Mr. Anthony Gabriele, Assistant Superintendent  
                 Centennial School District
- 11:20am      Panel 3- Advocate Perspective  
  
                 Attorney Maura McInerney, Legal Director  
                 Education Law Center  
  
                 Ms. Sylvia Richbow, Parent  
                 Chester Upland School District  
  
                 Mr. Aaron Riggleman, Manager of Government Affairs  
                 Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry
- 11:50am      Closing Remarks/Adjournment

***Written Testimony:***

PSEA  
Teach Plus

*All times are approximate and include time for questions.*  
Live streamed at [www.pahouse.com/live](http://www.pahouse.com/live)



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

House Education Committee  
Public Hearing on the Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes  
Dr. Carrie Rowe, Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education  
February 3, 2025

**Executive Summary**

Pennsylvania, like most states, has historically had multiple accountability and data reporting systems for different purposes. In 2018, as the Department transitioned to the reporting requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the [Future Ready PA Index](#) was designed as a singular, public-facing state school report card. PDE representatives traveled throughout the state, engaging more than 1,000 stakeholders at more than 30 public meetings, soliciting feedback on ways to improve school reporting. From those sessions arose a plan to create a more holistic measure of student and school achievement: The Future Ready PA Index.

The Index was designed to provide a more comprehensive look at how Pennsylvania schools are educating all students, while being easy for parents, policymakers, teachers, and school administrators to use.

The Index utilizes a “dashboard” approach to data visualization and measures schools in three main categories: the academic performance of students; if student progress is on track; and whether students graduate ready for college or to start a career.

The dashboard also illustrates progress in the three main categories by student group - including economically disadvantaged students, English Learners, students receiving special education services, and racial and ethnic groups. This allows parents and their communities to better understand student performance among the different groups.

A color-coded system illustrates student and school progress in the three main measurement categories.

The Index presents actual school performance for each individual indicator. There are presently 12 indicators, divided into three reporting categories, displayed on the Index:

- **State Assessment Measures**
  - Percent Proficient/Advanced on PSSA/Keystone Exam
  - Meeting Annual Growth Expectations (PVAAS)
  - Percent Advanced on PSSA/Keystone Exam
- **On-Track Measures**
  - English Language Proficiency
  - Regular Attendance
  - Grade 3 Reading/Grade 7 Mathematics Early Indicators
- **College and Career Measures**
  - Graduation Rate
  - Career Standards Benchmark
  - Percent Advanced on NOCTI/NIMS
  - Industry Based Learning

## Rigorous Courses of Study Post-Secondary Transitions

**State Assessment measurements** demonstrate student performance on the PSSA and Keystone Exam standardized tests and includes results at the school-building level. This also includes data from the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS), which measures growth in test scores and the percentage of proficient and advanced students from year to year or as an average over three years.

**On-Track measurements** show attendance, including chronic absenteeism, and indicate progress in reading and math and in English Language proficiency.

**College and Career-Ready measurements** illustrate how well students are being prepared for post-secondary success by showing access to rigorous courses, such as Advanced Placement, and by identifying industry-based credentials earned by students. It also includes data on college enrollment, military enlistment, and workforce participation.

Screenshots of the Index using a fictional school appear at the end of the document.

### Written Testimony

#### Guiding Principles

Pennsylvania was one of about a dozen states who chose to intentionally provide a non-summative, profile approach to school reporting and accountability.

Single summative rating systems which aggregate various measures, through policy-determined weightings, into a single summative value are inherently limited. Examples of a summative rating include a single numeric score, like a scale of 1-100; a “grade,” such as A-F; or “5-star” rating system like one would see on Yelp or Amazon.

Summative ratings provide limited transparency due to their reliance on the weighting and averaging of scores to combine them. A summative score may suggest or imply comparability when it does not exist, as it attempts to combine dissimilar measures. Policy values placed on each indicator raises the weight of one measure in the formula, thereby prioritizing it, while reducing the weight, and therefore the value, of another. When averaging indicators, higher performance on one indicator offsets lower performance on another.

For example, which school should attain a better, singular summative score: a school performing at 90% in Reading and 10% in Math; or a school performing at 50% in each? Both would display a similar average value. However, it's obvious that these schools are not facing similar challenges. A profile dashboard approach, like that provided by the Index, allows a viewer to see each has unique challenges and each would benefit from unique interventions.

A single number, letter, grade, or star-rating can be misleading. Pennsylvania's former school report card, the School Performance Profile, was often open to misinterpretation. The score was often converted to a percentage, even though it wasn't on a 1-100 scale. It was often assigned a letter grade, even though there was no correlation between levels of performance and percentiles in increments of ten.

The approach used in the Future Ready PA Index also allows Pennsylvania the ability to add, revise, or remove indicators without disrupting an overall aggregate formula. This flexibility has been praised by USDE, especially in the post-COVID era. Many states with a summative system were unable to produce reliable accountability scores when data sets were unavailable during the pandemic. Pennsylvania was not affected in this way. Also, many states have found

that the weighting of certain academic indicators has led to the over-identification of alternative and special education schools for School Improvement. Again, this is not the case in PA.

The dashboard shows performance at each individual indicator level, without aggregating those to a single, summative score. This treats the accountability system as a tool for continuous improvement rather than a punitive labeling process. The Index maximizes transparency of performance on individual measures and keeps dissimilar measures distinct.

### **Indicators**

Information displayed on the Index communicates school progress in clear, concise terms. Measurements of school success are less reliant on point-in-time standardized test scores and allow the community to determine the relevance of each indicator. The Index presents actual school performance for each individual indicator. There are presently 12 indicators, divided into three reporting categories, displayed on the Index:

- **State Assessment Measures**
  - Percent Proficient/Advanced on PSSA/Keystone Exam
  - Meeting Annual Growth Expectations (PVAAS)
  - Percent Advanced on PSSA/Keystone Exam
- **On-Track Measures**
  - English Language Proficiency
  - Regular Attendance
  - Grade 3 Reading/Grade 7 Mathematics Early Indicators
- **College and Career Measures**
  - Graduation Rate
  - Career Standards Benchmark
  - Percent Advanced on NOCTI/NIMS
  - Industry Based Learning
  - Rigorous Courses of Study
  - Post-Secondary Transitions

Six of these indicators, Proficiency, Growth, English Language Attainment, Regular Attendance, Graduation Rate, and Career Readiness are federally required by ESSA. These indicators are posted on the Index, and they are the six indicators that determine a school's federal School Improvement rating. The remaining six indicators are informational only.

Regular Attendance and Career Readiness are Pennsylvania's ESSA School Quality Indicators. We believe these indicators are critical to post-secondary success. Neither is dependent on standardized test scores or local academic requirements. Thus, these are most indicative of a school's locally designed internal support systems.

Regular Attendance is measured at the student level. It represents not the absentee rate of the school building, but the percentage of students who are absent for more than 10 percent of school days for which they were enrolled across that academic year. Measuring student-level attendance matters. Positive, statistically significant relationships between student attendance and academic achievement have long been documented by research. Chronic absence can be addressed when school communities work together to monitor the student attendance and implement solutions that address the underlying causes.

Pennsylvania's economic future depends on having a well-educated and skilled workforce. The rapidly changing workplace and the demand for continuous learning and innovation on the part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workers elevate the importance of highlighting, motivating, and rewarding schools for utilizing student career plans, portfolios, and career exploration and preparation

activities with all students. Pennsylvania was the only state to develop a K-12 Career Standards Benchmark under ESSA that was independent of any standardized test scores. Career Readiness measures in PA are performance based. Students produce artifacts that demonstrate student engagement by creating a career portfolio containing 20 or more pieces of evidence that validate that a student's individualized career plan has been created and implemented.

In creating a more well-rounded view of student achievement, the Future Ready PA Index provides a more accurate snapshot of how well community schools are educating their youth. It provides for increased career awareness instruction and rewards schools for graduating students with high-value, industry-recognized credentials. The Index focuses on ensuring students graduate both college and career ready, as it recognizes that there is more than just one pathway to success.

### **School Performance**

School performance is always displayed as the percentage of students who have achieved the indicator outcomes. The school's percentage is visually compared to the statewide average performance and the statewide ESSA goal. The comparison to the statewide average is made to give context for users. Schools are not rated against the average. The statewide average does not influence School Improvement ratings. Schools are identified for School Improvement based on their progress compared to the ESSA goals.

A dashboard icon is used to represent the school's performance on each scored indicator. Both the *color* and the *shape* of the icon convey meaning. This allows the display of multiple data points in a clear, concise visualization. The color of the icon shows the school's performance in relation to the ESSA goals:

*BLUE*- The school has met or exceeded the statewide 2033 ESSA goal.

*GREEN*- The school has not met the 2033 goal but has met or exceeded the yearly interim goal.

*RED*- The school has met neither the 2033 nor yearly interim goal.

Both BLUE and GREEN represent a positive outcome.

The shape of the icon shows the school's performance in relation to its performance on the same indicator the previous year:

*UPWARD ARROW*- Performance increased from the previous year.

*CIRCULAR DOT*- Performance is the same as the previous year.

*DOWNWARD ARROW*- Performance decreased from the previous year.

The local school community can dictate their own priorities when interpreting the results of the Index. A school focusing on improvement and growth may view favorably a GREEN UPWARD arrow over a BLUE DOWNWARD one. A school with high achievement in a particular indicator would likely rather see the inverse. The data can also assist local program planning and resource allocation. A school in a community rich with local industry may want to increase their Career and Technical Education offerings in relation to the number of graduates they serve. Other schools may want to focus on academic offerings such as Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate programs.

In some cases, a school may not have data to display. An *IS* icon represents an insufficient sample. A population of less than 20 students eligible for any indicator is considered statistically unreliable. A population less than nine is masked for confidentiality. A 'Data Does Not Apply' icon

is displayed for a school for whom no data is available for the indicator based on school configuration. For example, the Graduation indicator would not be applicable for an elementary school. Conversely, the Early Literacy indicator would not be applicable to a high school.

Perhaps the most powerful feature of the Index is the ability to disaggregate the performance on scored indicators into several student groupings, including students with IEPs, economically disadvantaged students, non-native learners of English, and the seven federally recognized racial-ethnic subgroups. This analysis allows school leaders to dissect trend data and determine root causes of successes and failures that affect all student groupings equally. This level of disaggregation was never before available in PA.

All dashboard icons are clearly labeled and defined on legends prominently displayed on the Index pages. The reader can be assisted by several help menus, informational icons, and resource documents throughout. Data and reporting can be downloaded into spreadsheets, charts, graphs, and text files for schools to use in preparing internal and external messaging and public reporting for constituents or the local School Board.

“Fast Fact” pages provide demographic information for the reader. Enrollment data is graphically displayed. Information about support available for gifted students, homeless and foster students, and students with military connectedness is given. Links to reporting about school safety, graduation data, and federal and state funding audits are also provided. The Index provides a “one-stop shop” for publicly accessible school accountability information.

The dashboard display provides transparency around student group performance and shows progress toward state goals over time without comparing dissimilar measures. In creating a more well-rounded view of student achievement, the Future Ready PA Index provides a more accurate snapshot of how well community schools are educating their youth. It provides for increased career awareness instruction and rewards schools for graduating students with high-value, industry-recognized credentials. The Index focuses on ensuring students graduate both college and career ready, as it recognizes that there is more than just one pathway to success.

### **Accountability**

In accordance with the ESSA mandated process of Annual Meaningful Differentiation, Pennsylvania identifies those schools who qualify for federal School Improvement designations in three categories:

- **Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI)**  
These are the lowest performing 5% of all Title I schools in Pennsylvania. Also, any school, Title I or not, with a combined 4- and 5-year graduation rate of 67% or less is identified for CSI. CSI is the most intensive improvement designation. It is re-evaluated every three years. Schools in CSI must enter into a technical support agreement with PDE. Additional funding is provided.
- **Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (A-TSI)**  
Regardless of their overall performance, any school in which student groups perform at or below CSI thresholds are identified for A-TSI. It is re-evaluated every four years. Schools in A-TSI engage PDE in needs assessment strategies and may receive additional funding. If a school does not show improvement in the 4-year cycle, it is designated CSI to provide additional support to the school. These schools are label A-CSI on the Future Ready PA Index to denote they are not one of the lowest 5% performing schools.
- **Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)**

This is a “warning list” for schools who fall short of the state-determined standards for individual student groups. TSI is determined annually. TSI schools are required to develop an improvement plan.

Schools identified for School Improvement are indicated with a banner in the heading of their Index page.

Schools are identified for school improvement through a process drawing on multiple measures, over multiple years. No single indicator’s performance in a single year can qualify a school for improvement. Schools exhibiting low student achievement and low student growth are defined as “low performing.” Low performing school exhibiting challenges in graduation rate, regular attendance, career readiness, and/or English proficiency are identified for School Improvement.

Additionally, ESSA mandates that any school, regardless of performance, with a graduation rate at or below 67% is identified for CSI.

All schools should be encouraged to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. The US Department of Labor found that a high school diploma meant an individual was 37.5 percent more likely to get a job than those who did not have a diploma, and high school diploma holders earned on average \$8,200 more per year than those who lacked a diploma.

Since the close of the pandemic in the 2020-21 school year:

- While we have not reached pre-pandemic thresholds, all State Assessment proficiency rates (Reading, Math, and Science) have increased modestly year over year. These gains are consistent with gains seen by other states.
- English Learner Growth and Attainment and Career Readiness have increased somewhat significantly.
- Graduation Rates have increased continually and have *surpassed* pre-pandemic levels. These increases are ahead of national trends.
- Regular Attendance has decreased both in PA and across the nation.

### **Summary**

The Future Ready PA Index provides an opportunity for individual communities—not state policy—to determine school success as it relates to local priorities and values. The dashboard maximizes transparency in reporting performance on individual measures. Areas of strength or in need of improvement are evident. Encompassing all indicators reduces the dependence on standardized tests by as much as 20 percent, giving educators an opportunity to focus on the curriculum that is important to their students and their communities. The Index is truly unique among accountability systems. It provides comprehensive measures that value schools’ efforts to help all students learn, grow, and succeed in the classroom and beyond.

**Examples from FutureReadyPA.org**

**Accountability Reporting: School -wide Snapshot**

1/28/2025

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**Accountability Reporting: All Student Performance**

**Regular Attendance**

Regular Attendance

Regular Attendance  
All Student Group Meets Performance Standard

Percent of Students with Regular Attendance	85.2%
Statewide Average	61.3%
Statewide Performance Standard	88.2%

Student Group Breakdown

1/28/2025

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## Accountability Reporting: Student Group Breakdown

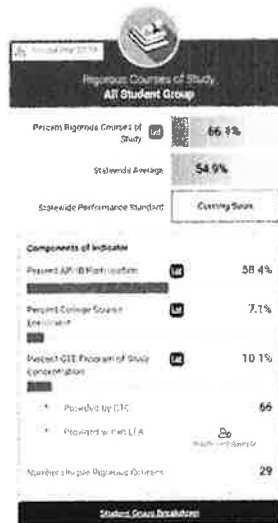
- Economically Disadvantaged
- English Learners
- Students with Disabilities
- Racial/Ethnic Groups
  - Asian
  - Black
  - Hispanic
  - Multi Racial
  - Native American/Alaskan Native
  - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - White
  - ❖ *Combined Ethnicity*



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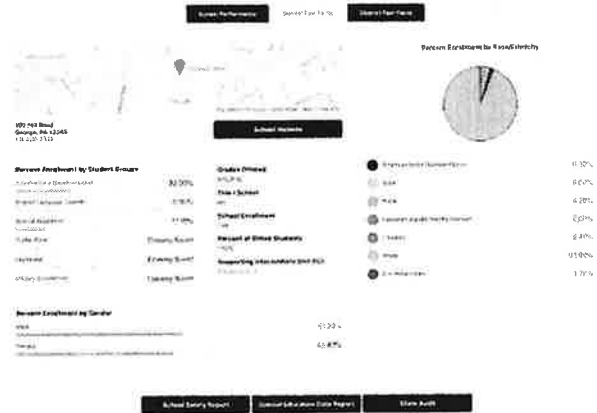
## Accountability Reporting: College/Career Readiness Indicator



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# Fast Facts: Demographics



1/28/2025





# **Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators**

## **Testimony to the House Education Committee**

**Monday, February 3, 2025**

## **Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes**

**Dr. Sherri Smith**

**Executive Director, PASA**

Good morning Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the House Education Committee. I am Dr. Sherri Smith, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Thank you for hosting this informational hearing on the issue of the Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes and inviting PASA to speak on behalf of more than 1000 PASA members, including over 600 who are sitting school superintendents, assistant superintendents, and executive directors.

In November 2018, The Pennsylvania Department of Education launched the Future Ready PA Index (FRPAI) dashboard in response to Federal ESSA requirements. The FRPAI was a newly idealized tool that recognized that students, and the schools that serve them, are more than just standardized test scores.

FRPAI established academic performance results of students are measured in two ways – overall performance and academic growth in each of the core subject areas of Reading/Literacy, Mathematics, and Science. Other indicators are also considered, such as Regular Attendance, Graduation Rates, English Language Proficiency, and Career Readiness. There was also an effort to add in local early indicators of success, specifically for 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade Reading and 7<sup>th</sup>-grade Mathematics.

The PA Department of Education navigated the difficult task of developing the FRPAI to provide additional measures of success for schools and students based on the strict guardrails provided in the federal ESSA guidelines. At times, these guidelines did not allow for some more common sense and aligned measures to current effective educational practices in the schools. For instance, the continuing practice of forcing 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students to take the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade PSSA, when they are enrolled in an advanced Algebra class and taking the Algebra Keystone lacks solid reasoning. Most of these students will do well on the Algebra Keystone, however, will not do well on the 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Mathematics PSSA as they have not studied these concepts for over a year. Also, the current practice of how we measure regular attendance (chronic absenteeism) is often misunderstood in the manner it is calculated based on Federal requirements. Chronically absent students include students who are absent regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused, which conflicts with how many school policies calculate attendance and truancy.

An additional factor to keep in mind when reviewing annual results on the FRPAI is that both Regular Attendance and Graduation Rates are lagging indicators; in other words, one full school year separates the most recent period for reporting and the publication of school and student group data. This year's reported data was from the 2022-2023 school year.

The 2024 standardized test scores in Pennsylvania continue to show a slow post-COVID rebound, with math and science scores showing growth and English scores remaining depressed. On the 2024 PSSA tests, roughly two-thirds of students tested statewide were at or above the benchmark in science and just over 40% hit the mark in math, with those numbers showing improvement from the pandemic slump and coming in below 2019 scores. Just over half of tested students scored proficient or above in English, representing an ongoing decline that started during COVID. Keystone Exams - which test algebra, literature, and biology show very similar patterns to the PSSA results.

Results on these assessments vary greatly between districts and/or schools. Determining actual growth for each district and school comes from comparing their specific results from year to year. Many schools showed growth and improvement in their state assessment results this past year, while others, based on their local factors, continue to struggle. We have shared some success stories as an addendum to this testimony.

Several mitigating factors influence the data collected and the results on the Future Ready PA Index- some stem from past conditions and some are more forward-thinking in nature.

Schools continue to forge forward post the disruptions and outcomes from the pandemic by continuing to concentrate on the following impacts:

- Student truancy continues to be a concern and a direct correlation to a decline in student learning. Getting students back to school consistently is a focused task for many schools.
- Increased numbers of students coming from Early Childhood and Pre-K with increased needs and delays. Over the past few years, there has been an increased number of students coming into kindergarten with special needs and are not ready for school, many times due to a lack of executive functioning skills. For example, in 2022, the Harrisburg School District reported that their baseline testing of incoming kindergarteners, for abilities such as recognizing letters and numbers, showed that only 14% of students entering the district were considered kindergarten-ready.
- The shortage of certified teachers in our classrooms is also a huge hurdle to overcome. Although appreciative of the thousands of emergency-permitted individuals teaching in our classrooms, these individuals often lack the knowledge, technical skills, and experience to immediately increase the academic performance of their students, as it takes time for educators to develop as well.
- Students lack concern and motivation to do well on PSSA or Keystone assessments. Students are more concerned about how they perform on their local and other critical assessments, such as SAT and ACT tests that have a direct impact on their futures.
- Parents/guardians are continuing to opt their children out of state testing. This has a direct impact on a school's assessment results as after a school gets below the 95% participation rate, each subsequent non-tested student must be designated as non-proficient.

## Future Factors:

As schools lean into establishing more effective instructional practices and structures to meet the needs of today's students, there is a greater disconnect from a total instructional focus on state assessments. Both the timing of state assessments as well as what and how they assess do not align with schools' local assessments and workforce engagement goals.

- Curriculum-focused changes often do not align with the current PSSA assessments and Keystone. The latest focus on implementing structured literacy and the STEEL standards are two key examples.
- As we advance career and workforce learning at the high school level, students are prioritizing graduation pathways over standardized tests as they do not find the tests important and relevant.
- As schools embrace newer more effective teaching methods, the correlation to state assessments lessens with a greater emphasis on aligned local assessments.
- The shift toward competency-based instruction aligned with standards is becoming a more common and desired practice, allowing for personalized learning rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. State assessments will need to adapt to these improved practices and timelines.

As the factors that impede data collection and results are examined, PASA proposes thoughtful consideration of the following principles to determine measures for success for our Pennsylvania schools and students:

- Districts and schools have the latitude to determine the forward-thinking criteria for success and the measurements that best fit these criteria.
- Consideration of how the community will measure success of their local school district.
- Measurements need to provide meaningful and relevant data to determine student competency and skill development and determine further direction.

We appreciate the House Education Committee providing PASA with the opportunity to provide these thoughts on the Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes. We welcome further collaboration to engage in other creative thinking and discussion to strengthen the measures of success of our schools across the Commonwealth.

## **ADDENDUM:**

### **PA School Success Stories -2024 State Assessment Results**

#### **Centennial School District**

Centennial School District has achieved or exceeded 100% of the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) growth targets across ALL measured areas in 2024!

Centennial School District (CSD) utilized additional funding, particularly through ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) grants, to support various initiatives to improve academic performance.

These initiatives were focused on curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, and systems. During the past couple of years, PDE recognized CSD as a model for the effective and strategic use of additional funds to improve teaching and learning and develop a strong teacher-leader model (coaches, liaisons, etc.). For example, we used 92% of our ESSER funds towards teaching and learning.

#### **Specifically, the additional funding was allocated as follows:**

**Curriculum:** ESSER funds were used to purchase new curriculum materials such as Foundations (K-3 phonics), Heggerty (K-2 phonemic awareness), Geodes Decodable Readers (K-2), and Didax Math Manipulative Kits (K-5). These resources supported the district's focus on core programs and alignment with Pennsylvania Academic Standards.

**Instruction:** The district invested in a 1:1 technology environment for grades K-5, which supported personalized learning and instruction. ESSER funds also supported the implementation of a Centennial Virtual Learning Academy (CVLA), which served an average of 70 students per year.

**Assessment:** Additional funding allowed the district to implement new assessment platforms, such as ESGI (K-2), DIBELS (K-3), and MAP (K-8). These platforms allowed the district to monitor student progress better and identify areas for improvement.

**Professional Learning:** ESSER and other funds were allocated to multi-year professional learning plans. These included partnerships with the University of Pennsylvania Penn Learning Network and the AIM Institute for Learning and Research, focusing on the Science of Reading and Structured Literacy. Professional learning on the science of learning and the brain was also a focus.

**Systems:** The district strategically used research and evidence-based systems to guide our plan, do, act, and check efforts ([Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools](#) and [NCEA Core Practice Framework](#)), strategically created new positions to support the focus on teaching and learning, including a Coordinator of Digital and Online Learning, a Coordinator of Social-

Emotional and Academic Learning, a Coordinator of ELD & Inclusive Practices, a Coordinator of Multi-tiered Systems of Support, and four Math Specialists. ESSER often initially funded these positions and later through other funding sources. The district also invested in a district data warehouse, Frontline systems, and a new website.

**The district made significant academic gains when these additional funds were available, including reaching 100% of PVAAS growth targets. However, some of these initiatives are being reduced due to the loss of extra funding, potentially impacting the district's ability to maintain these improvements.**

Specifically:

- Cuts to Teaching and Learning Budget: The Teaching and Learning budget is slated for a 13% decrease, or \$260,000.
- Technology Budget Reduction: The technology budget is reduced by \$792,200, or 24%.
- Reductions in Professional Learning: There are ongoing reductions to professional learning, teacher leader numbers, workshops and conferences, and curriculum/course design work.
- This includes cuts to K-12 Science of Reading / Structured Literacy Intensive Professional Learning with the AIM Institute for Learning and Research, K-12 Professional Learning with the University of Pennsylvania Penn Learning Network, and K-12 Professional Learning on Effectively Designed Instruction with EDvative.
- Staff Reductions: The district is reducing staff, including 3 FTEs (math specialist, reading specialist, music teacher) and 1 Coordinator of Social-Emotional and Academic Learning.
- Program Reductions: The elementary summer Kindergarten remediation program and K-5 Summer Book Pack programs for home libraries have been cut.
- Other Reductions: The district is experiencing reduced K-12 Professional Learning on Effectively Designed Instruction with EDvative and a delay in the Grs. K-12 Teacher and Student device refresh.

These budget cuts and reductions may hinder the district's ability to sustain the academic growth achieved in recent years by reducing curriculum, instruction, professional development, and staffing resources. The loss of funding for professional learning and curriculum could significantly undermine the district's goal of maintaining a district-wide focus on teaching and learning as a priority.

## **Moshannon Valley School District**

Our increased funding facilitated the ability to implement an MTSS program at Moshannon Valley Elementary that was directly responsible for our 100% growth in ELA and Math and 86% in science.

Monies began with COVID funding that paid for the independent audits (MTSS by Global Special Education Associates, and Core Curriculum by CMSi)

With the end of COVID funds, the increased funding from the state provided for"

- Purchase of MTSS curricular resources (Amira, Read 180 Flex, read 180 Direct, Exact Path, and others)

- Purchase of new core resources aligned to the standards and our MTSS program (HMH Into Reading and Into Math grade k- 12)
- Purchase of professional learning for staff (core resources learning, push-in instruction & co-teaching through Inspired Instruction, and differentiation training)

Without the increased dollars to support this initiative we would have struggled to provide all the necessary components to implement with fidelity. With that, we have seen an uptick in proficiency and seem to be moving in a positive direction in K-6. The challenge now is that for this to reap benefits long-term and positively affect our secondary learning and success, these programs have to remain in place for 3-5 years or longer so that students have the building blocks at the elementary level to be successful at the secondary level.

### **Selinsgrove Area Elementary School**

Post-COVID, Selinsgrove Area Elementary School recognized that students leaving 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and heading to grade 3 and a new building were not reading proficiently at a high enough rate. SAES had three consecutive years of second-grade reading proficiency scores at 50% or under as measured by DIBELS. Additionally, first-grade reading proficiency scores in those same three years were even lower. We knew we needed to do something different to get kids back on track post-COVID.

In the 2022-2023 school year, all teachers were trained in the science of reading through the LETRS program. At the start of the 2023-2024 school year, SAES implemented a science of reading-based approach to early childhood literacy through Amplify CKLA. Pairing this with mCLASS for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, a strengthened MTSS protocol, increased teacher collaboration through a PLC model, a new focus on data and parent communication of data, SAES has seen significant strides in student literacy achievement. In the 2023-2024 school year, the first year of implementation of the new curriculum, SAES saw its highest ever end-of-year literacy scores in kindergarten and first grade in 16 years of DIBELS assessments.

Recognizing the need to address learning loss and improve literacy practices post-Covid, we utilized ESSER funds to provide all teachers with comprehensive training in LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). This training laid the foundation for the adoption of CKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts) as our primary literacy resource. Funds were also used to supplement our approach to tiered intervention with a transition to mClass. (science of reading-based universal screening, progress monitoring, and instruction – Powered by DIBELS)

### **Souderton Area School District – English Language Learners**

As Souderton Area School District emerged from COVID, we acknowledged that each group of students was potentially impacted in different ways. Responding to new challenges initiated necessary revisions to our practice to meet the unique needs of each group, we utilized local, Federal, and State resources to address challenges related to the education of our English learners.



First, working with multilingual experts and consultants, we started the process of restructuring our English Language Development program. Traditionally, our ELs received pull-out and sheltered instruction, and while this yielded academic growth, our goal was to provide as much tier-1 instruction in the regular education classroom as possible. Starting with specific buildings, we fostered ongoing discussions with staff to provide a learning environment where English learners were supported in the regular education classroom for tier 1. As a result of restructuring and other interventions in one of our buildings, we saw over a 20% increase in English Language Growth and Attainment.

In addition to beginning the process of restructuring the English Language Development program, we also utilized funding to provide a summer program for our English learners. Recognizing the need for English language development, as well as core content knowledge, we provided an intensive summer program for our K-12 English learners. Partnering with other local organizations, Souderton Area School District teachers worked with our English learner families to provide robust instruction over the summer. As a result of the District's efforts, every building in the District that has an enrollment that meets the minimum threshold for a Future Ready indicator has demonstrated an increase in English Language Growth and Attainment since the 2021-2022 school year. While the work is not done, the additional funding through Federal and State sources has allowed the Souderton Area School District to initiate, revise, and expand programs that are having a positive impact on the growth and achievement of our English learners.

The additional funds also supported our tier-1 instructional program design for English Language Arts aligned with the state focus on Structured Literacy. Assessments and interventions were also implemented to respond to students' needs and provide supplemental to intensive support. As a result of the additional funds and strategic decision making our students are demonstrating growth in both math and English language arts.

**EDUCATION  
LAW CENTER**

**Testimony Before House Education Committee**

February 3, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Schweyer and Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the House Education Committee today. My name is Maura McInerney and I am the Legal Director at the **Education Law Center-PA (ELC)**, a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education.<sup>1</sup> I am also one of the attorneys who represented Petitioners in the school funding lawsuit, *William Penn Sch. Dist. v. Pennsylvania Dep't of Educ.*, 294 A.3d 537 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 2023).

As you know, in that case the Commonwealth Court declared Pennsylvania's school funding system to be unconstitutional on the ground that it violates both the Education Clause and the Equal Protection provisions of our state constitution.<sup>2</sup> The Court held that every student must receive "a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically, which requires that all students have access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education." *Id.* at 892. Accordingly, the Court directed the General Assembly to bring

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<sup>1</sup> **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, community engagement, 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, multilingual learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> See PA. CONST. art. III, § 14 ("The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth."); PA. CONST. art III, § 32.

Pennsylvania’s school funding system into constitutional compliance by ensuring that school districts have the essential resources they need to prepare their students to succeed and remedy deep funding disparities which have created wide gaps in student outcomes.<sup>3</sup> In making these determinations, the Court made clear that money matters in public education and credited the testimony of numerous fact witnesses, research studies, and experts who explained that “sustained increases in funding help eliminate achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their non-economically disadvantaged peers.” *Id.* at 931.

Following thirteen public hearings across the state, the bipartisan Basic Education Funding Commission (“BEFC”) Commission analyzed the data, considered key testimony, and adopted a majority report which recognized the need to calculate adequacy targets for each school district, invest in school facilities and our education workforce, and provide additional student supports.<sup>4</sup> The Report’s analysis and methodology relied on a “Pennsylvania-centric” approach to define adequacy targets based upon Pennsylvania’s performance standards and Pennsylvania school funding formulas.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, the General Assembly adopted the Adequacy Supplement Act 55 of 2024 which acknowledges a state adequacy gap in the amount of \$4.5 billion. This acknowledgment is enshrined in our Pennsylvania School Code. See 24 P.S. Education § 25-2502.48. The calculation is based on an analysis of what successful schools in

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<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the Court explained that Pennsylvania’s current school funding system has “disproportionately, negatively impacted students who attend schools in low-wealth school districts. This disparity is the result of a funding system that is heavily dependent on local tax revenue, which benefits students in high-wealth districts.” *Id.* at 960.

<sup>4</sup> See *Basic Education Funding Commission Majority Report* available at [https://www.pahouse.com/files/Documents/2024-01-11\\_023404\\_MajorityReport.pdf](https://www.pahouse.com/files/Documents/2024-01-11_023404_MajorityReport.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at p. 10.

Pennsylvania spend to ensure that their students meet academic standards, applying that per pupil cost to other districts recognizing each district's varying student needs.

Pursuant to this legislation, last year the General Assembly directed nearly \$500 million (\$494 million) in adequacy supplements to our state's 348 underfunded school districts to "start to close this gap."<sup>6</sup> This adequacy funding was the largest portion of the overall education funding increase last year (totaling \$1.1 billion). We applaud the work of this Committee to identify the \$4.8 billion adequacy gap and to start to address this gap through the allocation of new adequacy supplements to fill the state's \$4.5 billion share. This is a critical first start to achieving constitutional compliance. However, while the path forward to constitutional compliance has been charted, we are only beginning the journey to remedy decades of insufficient funding to our poorest school districts. We need a plan to ensure that sustained additional funding is provided in a timely manner to ensure we accomplish the goal set by the Court: that all students across the Commonwealth have access to a "comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education" and a meaningful opportunity to succeed. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 886.

To that end, I urge this Committee to consider the following factors in achieving this common goal:

**First and foremost, we lack a timeline, plan, or multi-year commitment in statute to pay down the remainder of the identified adequacy gap.** This makes it extremely difficult for school administrators to hire staff or invest in new and expanded programming as year-to-year districts are still uncertain about how much money they will receive. Moreover, we need a plan

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<sup>6</sup> House Appropriations Committee, 2024/25 Budget-in-Depth available at [https://houseappropriations.com/files/Documents/2024\\_%2025BudgetInDepth.pdf](https://houseappropriations.com/files/Documents/2024_%2025BudgetInDepth.pdf).

to meet the urgency of this moment for our children. Generations of schoolchildren across the Commonwealth have already been harmed by an inequitable and unconstitutional school funding system. The child who was entering first grade when we filed our lawsuit in 2014 is now a senior in high school. If we fail to accelerate investments to remedy the recognized adequacy shortfall, we leave another generation of schoolchildren behind. Today's schoolchildren are worth our investment and are entitled to be educated through a constitutionally compliant system of public education.

We must recognize, as one of our experts, Dr. Rucker Johnson explained at trial, that there is “cumulative nature of learning,” requiring that investments be sustained throughout a student's education. “[I]t's not only the level of the funding change that impact[s] student achievement, but ... how long ... [they are] exposed to the increased funding,” Research studies demonstrate that while spending increases can improve the outcomes for middle school and high school students that experience the increase, the impact is far greater when increased funding begins in the early elementary years. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 803. Evidence consistently shows that additional school funding investments, sustained over time result in positive academic outcomes, increases in lifetime earnings and reduces the achievement gaps between children in high-wealth and low-wealth districts.<sup>7</sup>

For all these reasons, **we ask the General Assembly to “fill it in four”** that is, to address the remaining \$4 billion adequacy gap for Pennsylvania public school districts over the next four

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<sup>7</sup> See e.g., C. Kirabo Jackson, *The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms*, Quarterly Journal of Economics (2016); Christopher A. Candelaria, Kenneth A. Shores, *Court-Ordered Finance Reforms in the Adequacy Era: Heterogeneous Causal Effects and Sensitivity*, *Education Finance and Policy* 2019; 14 (1): 31–60. Doi, available at: [https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp\\_v\\_00236](https://doi.org/10.1162/edfp_v_00236); Lee, K. G., & Polachek, S. W. *Do school budgets matter? The effect of budget referenda on student dropout rates*. *Education Economics*, 26(2), 129–144 (2017), available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2017.1404966>.

years, not eight. Next year's budget must ensure that all districts receive adequate funding within a reasonable period.

**Second, it is clear that school districts are utilizing the funding allocated to them in effective ways** that make a real impact on students. In fact, they have done so this year -- even when they did not learn about the funding until a month before the start of the new year. We have seen this in our Petitioner school districts which were part of the school funding lawsuit. Here are some examples:

**Greater Johnstown School District in Cambria County** is using its allocation in the following ways:

- Adding 11 tutors for Kindergarten, three Schoology coach stipends, and the salary/benefits; for three literacy coaches, salaries/benefits for three math coaches;
- Expanding after school tutoring at the elementary, middle and high school;
- Hiring a Re-engagement Coordinator and re-engagement specialist;
- Expanding mental health services, including adding therapists;
- Adding supplies for the CTE Program of Study and a welding instructor;
- Professional development training related to core programming best practices and instructional programs;
- Adding virtual learning for French 3 and 4;
- Maintaining hourly pay for teachers for Summer Credit Recovery for 7-12 grade students

**Wilkes-Barre Area** in Luzerne County allocated funds to:

- Expanding STEM education programs, including salaries and benefits;
- Adding salaries and benefits of coaches and educational support professionals to improve instruction
- Adding salaries and benefits of ESL teachers to deliver programs or activities that provide targeted support for English learners
- Adding salaries and benefits of teachers to implement programs or activities that promote the availability and utilization of physical and mental health services to meet the needs of children and families;
- Addressing issues that limit student academic achievement, including school attendance and engagement.
- Adding a remediation program
- Development of a multi-tiered system of supports to identify and assist students with academic or behavioral needs, including partial salary and benefits of an additional guidance counselor and software programs to support these initiatives.
- Maintaining the following programs:
  - Salaries and benefits to maintain full day kindergarten programs

- Salaries and benefits of teachers and resources to support the academic performance of students.
- Programs for high-quality continuing professional education.
- Required charter school funds.

**Panther Valley School District** in Carbon County allocated funds for new programming and positions including:

- Developing curriculum resources and materials to support academic performance.
- Compensation for staff to perform after-school tutoring sessions.
- Salary and benefits of a career counselor.
- Salary and benefits of a foreign language teacher.
- Salary and benefits of staff to allow for inclusion.
- Materials to engage students in applied learning and support academic achievement.
- Professional development expenses for staff.

They are also maintaining full day kindergarten.

Many other districts have re-opened school libraries that have been closed for years, rehired librarians to promote literacy, research skills, and digital literacy. Some districts are hiring teachers for the early grades so they can lower class sizes. Other districts that didn't offer full day kindergarten now can afford to do so. Districts are able to expand afterschool tutoring and hire instructional coaches to support teaching of literacy and math. There were also many districts that had taken a leap to use nonrecurring federal ESSER funds to hire staff to address glaring needs. For those districts, adequacy funding allowed them to maintain essential staffing and avoid painful layoffs. These are all the types of programs and services that are taken for granted in adequately funded schools. And these districts can provide even more needed services for their students if given adequate funding.

In its opinion, the Court observed that there were specific resources and strategies recognized by the state officials, experts, and Petitioner Districts as effective to support students in poverty to become college and career ready and close achievement existing gaps. These are the same strategies we now see being employed by districts utilizing their adequacy supplements: supporting sufficient numbers of effective teachers to meet increased student needs; providing early intensive resources (K to 3rd grade) focused on literacy, mathematics, and numeracy such as reading and math specialists; sufficient school counselors; school libraries and school librarians; and programs to increase school attendance and after-school programs. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 963–64. We must continue to support these efforts and rely on school districts as being in the best position to understand and address the needs of the children they serve. As studies of school funding reforms have shown, school districts invest funding wisely in the best interest of the children they educate. The majority of such investments are commonly spent on instructional services first and increased student supports second. *Id.* at 804 (discussing use of funding by districts following school funding reforms). This is precisely what we are seeing now in districts using their adequacy supplements across the Commonwealth.

Third, the adequacy investment needs to be accompanied -- as it was last year -- by additional funding for Basic Education and Special Education to ensure that schools have support in dealing with annual inflationary cost increases. Additional funding is also needed for facilities and Pre-K. This is necessary to implement a holistic approach to creating an equitable funding system.

The Commonwealth Court repeatedly recognized the need for safe and adequate facilities as a “component of a thorough and efficient system of public education” which is generally not



in dispute and must be addressed so students can learn. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 920.<sup>8</sup> Other states have addressed this issue through a variety of approaches including providing direct appropriations for construction costs and incorporating an equity component within their appropriation policy that prioritizes projects for school districts with low levels of property wealth.<sup>9</sup> The need to address stark inequities in school facilities remain to be addressed.

The Court also recognized the need for additional high-quality preschool statewide. Such investments are widely recognized as a critical tool for improving K-12 attainment and closing achievement gaps. The Court emphasized that quality early childhood education and pre-K are important investments particularly for children living in poverty; however, the majority of young children in Pennsylvania who are economically disadvantaged fail to receive these critical resources. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 915. As experts have explained and as demonstrated by outcomes in other states, pairing investments in K-12 education with investments in pre-K has a “multiplier impact” on students’ outcomes over time. *Id.* at 803.<sup>10</sup> The Office of Child

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<sup>8</sup> “Another component of a thorough and efficient system of public education that is generally not in dispute is the need for facilities. However, it is not enough that the facilities in which students learn are “generally safe,” as Legislative Respondents contend... Rather, they must be safe, and adequate. The Department and State Board have identified adequate facilities as being conducive to learning... Dr. Noguera also testified that quality and cleanliness of facilities are important for academic achievement... Yet, credible testimony was presented to the Court of makeshift classrooms set up in hallways, closets, and basements...insufficient numbers of nearby restrooms to serve students...and schools without functioning heat and air conditioning.” 294 A.3d at 920 (record citations omitted).

<sup>9</sup> See 50-State Comparison: K-12 School Construction Funding, Education Commission of the States, available at <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-k-12-school-construction-funding-2023/>.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in New Jersey, a study of the effects of a two-year preschool program found that it cut the achievement gap on state assessment tests in 10th grade by between 30%–40%. Barnett, W. S., & Jung, K. (2021). *Effects of New Jersey's Abbott preschool program on children's achievement, grade retention, and special education through tenth grade*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 56, 248–259. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.04.001>. See also Guthrie Gray-Lobe, Parag Pathak, and Christopher Walters, *The Long-Term Effects of Universal Preschool in Boston* (September 2022), available at [https://blueprintedn.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Long-Term-Effects-of-Universal-Preschool-in-Boston\\_Sept-2022.pdf](https://blueprintedn.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Long-Term-Effects-of-Universal-Preschool-in-Boston_Sept-2022.pdf). (Preschool enrollment boosts college attendance, academic achievement and high school graduation). Meloy, B., Gardner, M., & Darling-Hammond, L *Untangling the evidence on preschool effectiveness: Insights for policymakers*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute (2019), available at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/untangling-evidence-preschool-effectiveness-report>.

Development and Early Learning has also recognized that expanding high-quality preschool opportunities in Pennsylvania will help decrease the achievement gap for economically-disadvantaged children. *Id.* 294 A.3d at 599.<sup>11</sup> Today, staffing shortages and low pay are critical drivers of the lack of quality preschool for children living in poverty. Additional Pre-K slots must be forged by increasing the wage rate for preschool staff and ensuring their access to healthcare benefits to incentivize participation in this important workforce.

As the Commonwealth Court concluded, the consistency of resource gaps in our school system over years led to the “inescapable conclusion” that students in underfunded schools are not receiving a meaningful opportunity to succeed. *Id.* at 937. This deprivation violates students’ constitutional rights because the Court declared that education is a fundamental right in Pennsylvania -- a right guaranteed to every child regardless of their zip code, race, or wealth. *William Penn*, 294 A.3d at 963. The Court’s ruling means that the legislature cannot treat the need for adequate and equitable school funding as optional; it is and always will be a constitutional right. The General Assembly can remedy this violation and injustice by accelerating our course to accomplish that goal. If the legislature allocates \$1 billion in new funding to the adequacy line item in next year’s budget, we will have a clear path forward to achieve equity and create transformational change -- change that will vastly improve academic achievement and life outcomes for schoolchildren in underfunded districts across the Commonwealth. But time is not on their side; it is in your hands. Constitutional compliance must be accomplished for the children who are in school right now and the children who come after them. They can’t wait any longer. Thank you.

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<sup>11</sup> See *The Results Are In: Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts Program Makes a Big Difference*, PA Partnerships for Children Report (2021) available at <https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Pre-K-Counts-Program-Report.pdf>.

## **Testimony Before House Education Committee**

February 3, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Schweyer and Members of the Education Committees. Thank you for the chance to speak to the House Education Committee today. My name is Sylvia Victoria Richbow and I am the proud mother of two children who attend Chester Upland School District (“CUSD”). I also attended Chester Upland schools.

My son, Terron J. Adger is in 11th grade and attends STEM Academy at Showalter. He has been in the District since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. My son is social, likes sports, and wants to enter the National Guard and become a real estate agent after he graduates. He says he wants to wear a suit and tie every day in whatever work he does. My daughter, Terreona T. Adger is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and attends Toby Farms Intermediate School. She received early intervention services as a young child and was identified a child on the autism spectrum. Today she is an honor student at her school. Terreona is a perfectionist. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade she came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the districtwide Spelling Bee and cried that she didn’t come in first. Terreona likes to draw, read, and write stories. Most of all, she is creative. She loves music and plays the drums and guitar. Terreona she wants to go to college and hopes to become an actress.

Both of my children are benefiting in different ways from the additional funding provided to Chester Upland School District.

My son in high school has benefitted from an expanded afterschool tutoring program where he receives additional instruction from teachers in Math. As a result of the additional funding, the afterschool program has been expanded, adding more teachers who provide important support. The tutoring program allows Terron to learn at his own pace and has helped him understand math concepts in a better way. In addition, last year, the District was unable to

take students on college tours but this year the high school offered 15 college tours. This allows students to think about their futures. Terron also participated in “Financial Literacy Week” a new extracurricular program with Vanguard Financial Services where he learned about finances and from bankers. It was as a result of this program that Terron learned about different jobs and acquired his interest in real estate.

My son also benefits indirectly from funding that is provided to students experiencing homelessness and sees this firsthand with other peers in his classes. Sadly, my son has had a lot of friends at school who are experiencing homelessness. In fact, when my son was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade a father thanked me for his son’s sneakers. I didn’t know what he was talking about but later I learned that Terron had given him a pair of sneakers because the child had none. Additional funding is now being provided to support homeless students in our District, including providing clothing and more services and support. This helps all students because it takes the stress and distractions away, decreases bullying of children who are homeless and makes for a more positive school experience for my son.

Finally, my son has benefitted from having more time and attention from a school guidance counselor that is now directly impacting each grade. In the past, there was one guidance counselor for over 400 students in his school. Now there is a guidance counselor for each grade (9-12). My son has a great relationship with his counselor, Ms. Barnes who was there to support him after the death of two family members within eleven days. She also created a special program, “Senior Sunrise” to bring students together to better understand each other and offer counseling following the death of a promising classmate, Zaheem Sabree who was on the football team and died due to gun violence over the summer in our community.

My daughter, Terreona is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Toby Farms Intermediate School. In the past, there was only one special education teacher in her school who retired last year. Today, as a result of additional funding, the school was able to add more special education teachers to serve children with disabilities. Additional special education staff at Toby Farms consists of two learning support teachers, one emotional support teacher and three autistic support/life skills teachers. My daughter will be benefitting from additional staff to support her needs. She participates in an afterschool program that provides emotional support services called “Journal Club” where students in a small group learn how to manage their emotions. The school is also offering Drama Club for the first time this year.

My daughter is also benefitting from afterschool tutoring where she has received help in science. In particular, she received support to understand key concepts like kinetic energy. This expanded afterschool tutoring program is provided by a group of 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who teach core subjects and is very helpful for the students to have additional staffing from teachers they know and can build a relationship with.

In sum, the additional funding provided to our District is being put to good use and it is making a difference in the education of both of my children. In addition, I know other families who have also benefited from additional math and reading specialists in the classroom and other supports and services. I also know that additional funding is needed to help all of our students succeed. For example, our District needs to enable more students to learn a trade and increase computer skills like coding and learn about technology. This is needed to allow our youth to be more competitive in the current job market. Students also need more hands-on training and experience from certified industry technicians. This will also enable them to get a head start in the job market. I think these opportunities should be offered from intermediate school through

high school. We also need more books that children can take home, more libraries and librarians, and more pre-school slots so that young children enter Kindergarten knowing their letters and numbers. We also have significant facility needs in the District including needing a new roof for the high school, new windows, and 21<sup>st</sup> century science labs. We also need to address issues such as cracked and uneven paths and walkways, cracked walls and chipped paint, and missing bathroom stall doors.

The funding provided by the state is starting to make a difference in our community. I can see the changes for my children but I also know that more is needed. My children are worth your investment. Thank you.



Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the  
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

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Before the:  
**House Education Committee**

Presented by:  
Aaron Riggleman,  
Manager, Government Affairs

**Main Capitol Room 120**  
Harrisburg, PA  
February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025

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Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and honorable members of the House Education Committee, my name is Aaron Riggleman, and I am the Manager of Government Affairs for the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry. The PA Chamber is the largest, broad-based business advocacy association in Pennsylvania. We represent employers of all sizes, across all industry sectors throughout the Commonwealth.

Pennsylvania employers have a significant stake in our Commonwealth's education system. Today's students are tomorrow's business leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators, and skilled workforce. A strong, effective education system is critical for our economy to thrive. Employers also have a financial stake in our education system. In 2021, the Independent Fiscal Office reported that total property taxes (including school and municipal) paid by businesses in Pennsylvania totaled \$13.2 billion and accounted for 36 percent of the total business tax burden in Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>. As major investors in our education system, businesses care deeply about our schools and support policies that help Pennsylvania's children succeed and lead to a vibrant economy. Achieving these goals requires the participation of, and enhanced coordination among, stakeholders, including public schools, which must continue to review and improve the manner in which students are educated and prepared for the workforce, higher education, or whichever path they choose.

Pennsylvania's 21st-century economy increasingly requires individuals entering or participating in the workforce to obtain specific skills, training, and, at a minimum, fundamental education, much of which is provided through our public school system. Businesses know how

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ifo.state.pa.us/download.cfm?file=Resources/Documents/SD\\_Prop\\_Tax\\_Update\\_Aug\\_2022.pdf](http://www.ifo.state.pa.us/download.cfm?file=Resources/Documents/SD_Prop_Tax_Update_Aug_2022.pdf)



important it is that our education system produces students equipped with a wide array of employable skills. The PA Chamber supports a robust education system where success is measurable through rigorous standards and schools are empowered to hold themselves accountable for outcomes.

### **Pennsylvania's Current Position**

Funding is, of course, an important part of the discussion. The Legislature has made historic investments in public schools, with a nearly 60 percent increase in total K-12 spending over the last decade. Evaluating per-pupil funding specifically from the state, Pennsylvania ranks 21st in the nation, about 10 percent above the national average. When considering all sources of spending, including federal and local, Pennsylvania jumps to the 9th highest per-pupil spending in the nation, or 27 percent above the national average<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, according to the National Education Association, Pennsylvania has the 10th highest starting teacher salary in the country and the 6th highest top salary for teachers with a bachelor's degree<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately, these relatively robust investments do not appear to correlate with student outcomes when considered in the aggregate. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports Pennsylvania students as roughly average in math and reading proficiency, with little progress—and in some cases regression—in the last five years<sup>4</sup>.

Additionally, Pennsylvania ranks worse than 29 states in average SAT scores<sup>5</sup>. As we begin a

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<sup>2</sup> <https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank/teacher#:~:text=The%20national%20average%20public%20school,592\)%20at%20the%20low%20end](https://www.nea.org/resource-library/educator-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank/teacher#:~:text=The%20national%20average%20public%20school,592)%20at%20the%20low%20end)

<sup>4</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/state/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/sat-scores-by-state>

conversation today about student outcomes, I would be remiss if I didn't point out that without measurable metrics like those cited above, we wouldn't be able to compare our school success to our other states. It's for this reason; I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Pennsylvania's business community regarding the state's education system and how we can ensure our education system is one based on outcomes that are measurable year over year.

### **Need for Outcomes Based Accountability**

While Pennsylvania invests more and more year over year in K-12 education, it is clear that increased funding alone is not the sole determinant of student outcomes. To maximize the return on this investment, we must first ensure that resources are being used effectively to drive measurable progress in student achievement. Accountability is not an option but an imperative, both for current spending and any conversations of increasing spending with a focus on aligning funding with outcomes that prepare students for success in both higher education and the workforce. Without clear metrics and transparency, additional funding risks perpetuating inadequacies rather than addressing the root causes of underperformance.

An important part of understanding, in real time, student progress and the return on taxpayers' investment is through testing student knowledge. The age-old ritual of school tests has perhaps never been as unpopular as it seems to be today. Yet school tests – particularly standard assessments that allow comparisons among students in different schools, districts and regions – are a necessary tool for tracking growth and ensuring students are obtaining a baseline knowledge. While student preparedness cannot be adequately assessed solely through standardized tests, and the subjects on which they focus, they serve as a minimum foundation

upon which other skills and academic proficiencies are built. The PA Chamber supports standardized assessments, such as the PSSAs and Keystone Exams, which should be viewed as a floor for student knowledge attainment and one of many tools for measuring opportunity gaps within our education system.

Standardized tests, of course, only represent one outcomes-based measurement tool that can be used to evaluate the success or lack thereof of our school system. The Future Ready PA Index, a topic of this hearing, is a prime example of the kinds of tools that provide policymakers and advocates a transparent and accessible view of student outcomes. Policymakers should avoid narrowing the tools available to evaluate student progress by eliminating assessments in favor of a dashboard (such as the Future Ready PA Index) or vice versa but rather look for ways to expand the metrics we can use to evaluate our public education system. When making decisions, having more data points is always beneficial, as it provides a clearer, more comprehensive picture to inform effective and well-rounded policies.

Data based student achievement metrics equip us with the tools to evaluate whether investments in education are translating into real improvements, such as higher proficiency rates, better graduation outcomes, and stronger workforce readiness. By setting clear expectations for performance, Pennsylvania can identify what schools are finding success and which are not, allowing lawmakers to identify and help address schools and educators who have shown an inability to achieve positive student outcomes.

### **What Employers Need**

The ability of Pennsylvania's business community and economy to succeed depend in large part on the effectiveness of our K-12 education system. When measuring student success, policymakers should consider what skills and abilities Pennsylvania employers are looking for? Employers in Pennsylvania are seeking a workforce equipped with a blend of academic, technical and basic social and behavioral skills to meet the demands of our evolving economy. While proficiency in core subjects such as mathematics and reading remain foundational, employers increasingly emphasize the importance of skills that go beyond math and reading. These skills are essential for navigating a quickly changing job market that require skills that are transmissible between specific jobs.

Soft skills such as the ability to work with colleagues, problem solving, critical thinking, and time management are also highly valued by employers. Businesses across the Commonwealth report that these attributes are often as important as academic achievement in determining an employee's success. Additionally, employers place great emphasis on employability skills such as punctuality, responsibility, and professionalism. These skills may seem basic, but they are critical for success in the workplace.

### **How We Equip Students with These Skills**

Our public school system plays an important role in helping to instill these values in our students both during the normal cadence of the school day, but also by thinking of creative opportunities to diversify the academic offerings and experiences for all students. Schools can play a key role in fostering these attributes by incorporating project-based learning, real-world problem-solving, and opportunities for students to engage in partnerships with employers.

Youth employment also provides invaluable opportunities for students to build the skills that will be necessary to eventually transition successfully into the workforce. By working part-time jobs during high school, students gain hands-on experience that hone the very skills that employers demand in any career. These jobs are often the first opportunities for young people to learn how to collaborate with coworkers and follow instructions, to be punctual and professional. Early exposure to the work environment helps our young citizens develop a strong work ethic and adaptability, preparing them for future employment. When paired with academic learning, teen employment bridges the gap between school and career preparation, equipping students with the experience and skills that employers value highly in entry-level candidates. We hope lawmakers will pursue a legislative agenda that encourages youth employment and the retention and creation of the jobs for which these young Pennsylvanians are qualified.

Lastly, career and technical exposure in K-12 education is essential for preparing students to meet the demands of the modern workforce. By introducing students to career pathways early, schools can help them discover their interests, develop marketable skills, and better understand opportunities in fields like healthcare, manufacturing, and the skilled trades. Partnerships with local employers that provide demonstrations or site visits offer students a tangible understanding of workplace expectations and career opportunities. Providing this exposure early in K-12 allows students to make informed decisions about post-secondary education or entering the workforce directly, helping to reduce skills gaps and position Pennsylvania's economy for long-term growth.

### **Conclusion**

I thank this committee again for the opportunity to testify today and recognizing employers as key stakeholders in our education system. Lawmakers have the opportunity to elevate Pennsylvania's status as a national leader and educational trend-setter, where policymakers and educators focus more on student outcomes, rather than financial inputs. Where rigorous standards and a system of accountability help Pennsylvania children live up to their potential. Where students and families are empowered to choose the educational path that best suits their unique needs. And where our business community and state economy flourish with an ever-expanding pool of home-grown talent Thank you again and I am happy to answer any questions.



## HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE The Future Ready PA Index

On behalf of PSEA’s 177,000 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Future Ready PA Index, Pennsylvania’s public-facing dashboard that tracks school and student progress across multiple indicators. These indicators—required for both federal and state accountability—reflect extensive input from stakeholders, including PSEA, during the development and implementation of Pennsylvania’s Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Future Ready PA Index simplifies complex data points, policy decisions, and processes into more accessible insights, helping the public understand whether schools and students are progressing toward the state’s long-term goals. Providing transparent, meaningful, and actionable information to stakeholders is crucial for advancing access to high-quality K-12 public education. PSEA applauds the Shapiro Administration’s continued commitment to the Future Ready PA Index and responsible public school accountability.

While the Index has served its intended purpose of offering a more complete representation of the state’s accountability outcomes, the current approach warrants consideration of improvements.

The Index was developed prior to the historic court ruling Pennsylvania’s funding system unconstitutional and making it clear that for Pennsylvania to have a constitutional system “*all students must have access to a comprehensive, effective and contemporary system of public education.*” Such a system requires not only progress on “outcomes” but also ensuring schools have the necessary “inputs” for providing every student with a meaningful opportunity to meet state determined outcomes.

*These inputs – adequate and equitable funding; sufficient, qualified staffing; safe, adequate facilities conducive to learning; standards-aligned curriculum, courses, and programming; and modern, quality instrumentalities of learning – are critically important for every student in PA, but most especially for students in poverty.* In many low wealth districts, however, insufficient resources mean inputs are inadequate or missing entirely.

In light of the Commonwealth Court’s ruling, PSEA maintains that the Index could be improved to provide the critical context needed by policymakers, stakeholders, and taxpayers to have a full picture that is consistent with both of the inputs and outputs identified by the Court. After all, sustainable school improvement can only be achieved through the active engagement of fully informed educators, students, parents, and community members. Without reflecting the necessary inputs, the Index does not provide a comprehensive picture. It may show significant achievement gaps between low-wealth and high-wealth districts, yet the dashboard doesn’t account for the decades of systemic inequity in funding, resources, and staffing that directly impact the availability of educational opportunities for students. **Revising the Index to provide**

**stakeholders with data on both outcomes and inputs available will greatly enhance its usefulness as a tool in advancing student success.**

**PSEA Additional Recommendations for Improvement:**

- Deliberate and intentional engagement with educators, students, parents, and community members on specific ways the Index can be improved and more accessible.
- Connect to other resource portals directly from the Index such as the Future Ready Comprehensive Planning Portal, the Standards Aligned System, and Pennsylvania’s Evidence Resource Center. These portals should be viewed as additional resources for local stakeholders to better understand the evidence-based practices and strategies available for improving the challenges identified within their schools.
- Provide direct connections from the Index to the legally required plans schools and districts develop. While many of the plans already exist in the public domain, they are in various formats and locations and not easily accessible to parents, educators and other stakeholders. Without enhanced transparency and accessibility, the ability of stakeholders to help ensure schools are implementing the plans with fidelity is greatly limited. Some plans that could be connected via the Index include:
  - Local strategic plans as required by 22 PA Code Chapter 4;
  - Per-pupil expenditure reports as required by ESSA (*the Index includes a link to “Fiscal Facts” for districts but the most recent reports are from 2021-2022*);
  - District plans required for receipt of Ready to Learn Block Grant funding, specifically the plans for the 24/25 Adequacy Supplement;
  - Plans required for districts identified for Financial Recovery; and
  - Improvement plans for schools designated for Comprehensive Support and Improvement and Additional-Targeted Support and Improvement.

PSEA appreciates the House Education Committee’s attention to school accountability and student outcomes. Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

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**Written testimony of Teach Plus PA before the House Education Committee  
Monday, February 3, 2025  
Harrisburg, PA**

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and Esteemed Education Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of Teach Plus PA for today's hearing on student outcomes in Pennsylvania. Teach Plus PA is an education non-profit that empowers excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing our mission, we are guided by our Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success.

This hearing is timely because it comes on the heels of the release last week of the results of the 2024 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly known as the "Nation's Report Card." The NAEP is unique in that it allows us an opportunity every two years to measure the performance of Pennsylvania students against both past performance and other states; no other metric allows us a similar longitudinal and national yardstick.

Unfortunately, the picture painted by this year's NAEP data is sobering. While student performance held steady from 2022 in 4th grade math and 8th grade reading and ticked upward in 8th grade math, it has still not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. But the data is most troubling in 4th grade reading – a critical benchmark for students that is highly predictive of future academic and life success. Research tells us that students proficient in reading by 4th grade are much more likely to graduate from high school, earn higher wages, and even live longer, while students who are not proficient by this key milestone are unlikely to ever catch up and are more likely to drop out, face unemployment, and become involved with the criminal justice system. A Gallup and Barbara Bush Foundation [study](#) found that bringing all adults to a sixth-grade reading level would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income for the U.S. economy. Illiteracy even impacts public health: Individuals with low literacy face higher hospitalization rates, lower engagement with preventive care, and greater difficulty understanding medical information, at a cost of up to \$238 billion in [additional annual healthcare costs](#), and children with reading difficulties who don't get help are more likely to suffer from [mental health issues](#) including depression and anxiety.

According to the most recent NAEP data in 4th grade reading in Pennsylvania:

- Only **33% of students** – 1 in 3 – are proficient or above. This is a 7-point decline from 2013. Only 16% of Black students, 16% of Hispanic students, and 23% of economically disadvantaged students are reading proficiently.
- Pennsylvania's average scale score has dropped **10 points since 2013** (from 226 to 216), a decline steeper than the national average (6 points).
- Since 2019, Pennsylvania has experienced the **13th largest drop** in fourth-grade reading scores nationally.

If we look at Pennsylvania's performance on the NAEP over the past 25 years, we see that there was one period of dramatically improving student achievement across all grade levels and subjects. Between 2002 and

2011/13,<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania NAEP scores increased significantly in every category, with particularly large gains for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Our analysis of the causes of the gains during this time period identifies a confluence of several factors:

- 1. An increased focus on student outcomes.** The federal accountability movement, while controversial in many ways, is credited by researchers with having led to national improvements in academic outcomes. The introduction of strong accountability measures and focus on the performance of student subgroups led to increased attention to instruction. Pennsylvania, already having implemented rigorous content standards and statewide assessments prior to No Child Left Behind, quickly adapted by emphasizing subgroup performance, which led to achievement gains that exceeded the national average, especially among historically underserved students. Bipartisan support for high academic expectations remained strong during this period, though it has since fractured.
- 2. A stronger investment in state education funding.** Under Governor Ed Rendell (2003–2011), Pennsylvania saw substantial increases in state education funding, reversing a long-term decline in state contributions. Funding was particularly directed toward high-need districts through adequacy targets and accountability block grants, which helped narrow racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps. These investments, coupled with accountability measures, enabled districts to implement research-based interventions that contributed to student performance gains.
- 3. Increasing early childhood education quality and access.** Before the early 2000s, Pennsylvania did not invest state funds in pre-kindergarten. The introduction of state-funded pre-K and the Keystone STARS system to ensure quality, along with incentives for districts to expand early childhood education, aligned with research showing long-term academic benefits, likely contributing to improved student outcomes.
- 4. Strong state-level leadership focused on education.** Governor Rendell positioned himself as an “education governor,” using his platform to champion public schools and push for increased investment and accountability. The General Assembly also embraced this focus on education in a bipartisan manner. Meanwhile, a more muscular Pennsylvania Department of Education worked closely with districts to ensure data-driven, evidence-based improvements. This strong state-level leadership fostered a culture of high expectations and high support for schools, educators, and students.
- 5. A plentiful supply of high-quality teachers.** In the early 2000s, Pennsylvania had a strong pipeline of highly qualified teachers, producing more than the state needed and exporting educators to other states. This surplus allowed districts, particularly low-wealth ones, to attract and retain effective teachers, especially as state funding increased. Even during the Great Recession, federal stimulus funds helped maintain staffing levels, sustaining instructional quality.

The reversal of these gains began with a round of devastating school funding cuts in 2011, which disrupted schools and decimated staffing at high-need schools. By the time school funding recovered several years later, the supply of teachers was beginning a decades-long nosedive, and there was less attention to instruction and student learning results at the state level.

If Pennsylvania is to recover from the astonishing learning loss of the past decade – which began well before the pandemic and continues to persist – it will require a multi-pronged approach, similar to what we saw in the early 2000s. It is important to note that only a comprehensive approach can be expected to yield results, and isolated attempts are likely to be successful. Based on our analysis of what has worked in Pennsylvania in the

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<sup>1</sup> In some categories, scores peaked in 2011, while others peaked in 2013.

recent past to accelerate student learning gains, we believe that the following strategies should be pursued concurrently to reverse the downward trajectory of student outcomes in Pennsylvania:

- 1. Continued efforts to ensure that students in low-wealth communities receive equitable funding and access to high-quality educational opportunities.** A major driver of the gains of the early 2000s was an increase in state funding for K-12 and early childhood education, with a focus on low-wealth communities. The Commonwealth Court ruled Pennsylvania's current school funding system is unconstitutional in that it disadvantages students from low-wealth districts, and the General Assembly identified a \$4.5 billion adequacy gap in last year's state budget, of which only about 1/9 has been filled in year one. The 2024 NAEP testing window preceded the first year of investments; however, research has demonstrated that increased resources do correlate with improved student performance, so as the state fulfills its adequacy obligations in the coming years, this should provide a boost to student outcomes, particularly in under-resourced schools and districts. Along with our partners in the PA Schools Work coalition, we call on the legislature to "fill it in four": fulfill its constitutional obligation by closing the remaining \$4 billion adequacy gap over the next four state budgets.
- 2. A commitment to targeting investments toward evidence-based interventions, particularly in early literacy.** While it is important to level the playing field and ensure that low-wealth districts have adequate resources to support basic operations, it is also critical that the state take a lead in investing in evidence-based interventions. The states that have made the most progress in recent years on the NAEP, including Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee, have made strategic investments in evidence-based reading instruction, particularly in the areas of curriculum, teacher training, and screening/intervention. Mississippi, the fastest-improving state in the country in 4th grade reading over the past decade, was the first state to embrace the science of reading through policy, and Louisiana, which has made the largest gains in 4th grade reading over the past two NAEP cycles, credits their "systematic approach" to curriculum and instruction. Along with our partners in the PA Literacy Coalition, we call on the legislature to invest \$100 million this budget season to support schools in shifting to evidence-based literacy instruction, including curriculum, teacher training, literacy coaching, universal screening, and interventions aligned with the science of reading, as proposed in forthcoming legislation from Representatives Ortity and Fleming.
- 3. A bold and ambitious effort to rebuild the educator pipeline through innovative recruitment and retention.** Research tells us that teacher quality is the most important in-school factor that impacts student outcomes. Even with additional state investments in our public education system through increases to adequacy, BEF, and SEF funding, the impact of these investments will be limited if there is not a plan – along with dedicated resources – to reverse the devastating decline in our teacher pipeline and address Pennsylvania's worsening teacher shortage crisis. Specifically, any infusion of new state resources to inadequately funded districts will only increase demand for qualified educators at a time when supply is at record lows. Without simultaneous, targeted investments to grow the educator pipeline, the districts most in need of qualified teachers will still be unable to hire them because qualified teachers cannot be created overnight or from thin air, and districts will be forced to resort to hiring emergency-permitted teachers with insufficient training, reduced effectiveness, and lower retention rates. Along with our partners in the #PANeedsTeachers coalition, we call on the state to fully fund the student teacher stipend program at \$50-55 million, improve access to educator workforce data and analysis through the creation of a dedicated educator workforce research center at a Pennsylvania university, incentivize strategic staffing and advanced teaching roles through a pilot grant program, and invest in a high-quality grow-your-own teacher apprenticeship grant program.
- 4. A strong focus on instruction and student learning across the governor's office, General Assembly, and Pennsylvania Department of Education.** Investments are critical, but aligned leadership and political will are also necessary. If we are to match the student achievement gains of the early 21st

century in Pennsylvania, it will require bipartisan support for education, sustained attention to student outcomes, and a more proactive role for the state department of education in supporting districts and educators in improving instructional quality and utilizing evidence-based approaches.

There is no silver bullet to addressing this crisis in student learning; but the consequences of failing to address it reach beyond our schools, impacting our commonwealth's future economy, workforce, and public health. The NAEP numbers are not just statistics; they represent real students—our future leaders, workers, community members, and voters—who are being denied the fundamental skill of reading that unlocks all other learning.

Our commonwealth stands at a crossroads. We can either continue down a path of stagnation, watching more students fall through the cracks, or we can take bold, research-backed action to ensure **every child learns to read**. Bold actions and investments are needed now to secure Pennsylvania's future.

Thank you for your time and commitment to this critical issue. Teach Plus PA stands ready to partner with you in developing student-centered, teacher-informed, evidence-based policy solutions to ensure that over the next decade, Pennsylvania becomes the fastest-improving state in the country in 4th grade reading, so that over time, all students in Pennsylvania have the opportunity to fulfill their potential and pursue their dreams in an educational system that equips students holistically and equitably with the skills, knowledge, and mindsets they need to achieve success as they define it for themselves.