



PARSS Legislative Update

February 7, 2024

Governor Shapiro Unveils a BIG Funding Proposal for Basic Education

The anticipated state budget news on a new and improved Basic Education Funding (BEF) system did not disappoint. Yesterday, Governor Shapiro nearly doubled down on last year's "historic increase" of \$567 million in BEF by unveiling a nearly \$1.1 billion funding stream for k-12 to answer the Commonwealth Court's school funding decision which will celebrate a one-year anniversary today.

Addressing the General Assembly in the Capitol Rotunda due to the repair work in the House chamber, the Governor said, "The 2024-25 budget builds on that historic progress by acting on the bipartisan work of the Basic Education Funding Commission and delivering a comprehensive solution on K-12 education in Pennsylvania with another historic investment in basic education funding to continue to ensure that every Pennsylvania child has the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed."

The BEF increase will be segmented into two calculations--\$200 million through the existing BEF formula and \$872 million through an "adequacy investment." You can see your district's new adequacy investment by [clicking here](#) and scrolling

down. Under the adequacy formula, eighty-four districts will not qualify for additional funding.

The Governor also called for a statewide cyber charter tuition rate, using \$8,000 as a suggested rate (see below). He also left the door wide open for funding tuition scholarships but did not include a line item in his budget (see below).

Here are some highlights of the other education programs the Governor mentioned in his budget address:

- an increase of \$50 million for special education
- the establishment of a statewide cyber tuition rate of \$8,000 per student per year estimated to save school districts \$262 million annually
- a \$2.4 million increase for Career and Technical Education (CTE)
- \$7 million in continuing support of dual enrollment
- \$50 million for continuing investment in school safety and security improvements
- \$300 million for environmental repair projects in school buildings
- \$100 million for student mental health resources
- \$17 million to Early Intervention
- \$10 million for the Educator Talent Recruitment Account to attract new entrants in the teaching profession by covering tuition, fees, supplies or other costs
- an increase in funding for student teacher stipends by \$5 million to a total of \$15 million

Here are some excerpts from the Governor's budget message yesterday.

On A Statewide Cyber Charter Tuition Rate...

When the charter school law was first adopted in 1997, the idea of going to a cyber school was new and relatively few parents sent their kids there. But today, nearly 60,000 Pennsylvania students go to cyber charters. However, we've never gone back and reevaluated how we fund these schools. Cyber schools get the same amount per student as brick-and-mortar schools do.... In practice, that means one district might pay 7,000 dollars to a cyber charter while another must pay 10,000 dollars to the exact same school.

And while cyber charters certainly need adequate funding to operate, logic would dictate that two students going to the same school, getting the same education, would pay the same rate. Logic would also dictate that they need less than a brick-and-mortar charter school simply because they don't have the same physical infrastructure.... Let's say we set a rate of 8,000 dollars per student – the amount set by a bill that passed the House last year in a bipartisan manner. If we do that, we will level the playing field, and as a result, we'll be able to return 262 million dollars back to our public schools.

On Private School Tuition Scholarships...

And look, one of those conversations will need to be about scholarships that let poor families in struggling school districts put their kids in the best position for them to succeed – whether that's paying for extra tutoring, books, and computers, or yes, going to another school.

The Senate passed a proposal last year that included important elements of that, and it's something I support and consider to be unfinished business. I'm grateful House Democratic Leadership has committed to examine and seriously consider this proposal to address the needs of our most at-risk learners.

So, we've left room for the House and Senate to find common ground on this. Let's not shy away from the many difficult conversations around education.

On School Facility Grants...

The Scranton School District alone has identified more than 300 million dollars in necessary repairs – everything from installing a new fire sprinkler to removing lead paint. The Sto-Rox School District in McKees Rocks has at least 14 million dollars' worth of work that's needed. All three of their school buildings need urgent roof repairs to prevent leaks when it rains.

And the Panther Valley School District in Schuylkill and Carbon counties told the Basic Education Funding Commission that kindergarteners are forced to learn in rooms without air conditioning because they can't afford the upgrades.... So, my budget builds on the progress we've made, setting aside one-and-a-half billion dollars – including 300 million this year alone – to make our schools healthy and safe.

On the Commonwealth Court school funding decision....

But we all know – and the Court has ruled – that we need a constitutional, comprehensive solution to guarantee every student the thorough and efficient education they are entitled to under Article III Section 14 of our state constitution. So, let's build on the work we've already done together.

The same Court that held our system of funding unconstitutional directed us to get around the table and come up with a better system. It should be noted that everyone here – legislators from both parties in both chambers – accepted the remedy the Court put forth by virtue of your decision not to appeal that ruling. With that decision, Republican leaders agreed to come to the table and fix the way we fund education.

Feminine Hygiene Product Availability in Schools...

This budget addresses a challenge for so many girls who access lack to feminine hygiene products at home and at school. This is something we don't often talk about, but the First Lady has spent time this year meeting with these young women and hearing their stories.

Lori has spoken to girls who have literally missed school because they got their period and had to run home in the middle of the day – because nothing was available for them at school. This budget makes feminine hygiene products available at no cost in our schools, because girls deserve to have peace of mind so they can focus on learning.