

The Good and The Bad: Recap of the FY 12-13 State Budget and Other Activities

THE BUDGET

The Good: By working together and speaking up, we were successful in getting funding restored in both Senate and House budget proposals which the Governor proposed be cut in his budget. Basic Education Funding, the Accountability Block Grant, Higher Ed and Early Ed were not cut any further over last year's devastating cuts. Included in the basic education line item is \$50 million for fiscally distressed schools, \$10 million of which will be in the form of zero-interest loans.

The Bad: This cements the drastic funding cuts education received in this current year's current budget. As revenues continue to come in higher than projected, our job moving forward will be to continue to remind our legislators of the importance of providing a quality education to ALL students in Pennsylvania, the benefits of these investments and urge them to fight to restore the resources needed to support the programs our children need to learn.

Public Funds for Private Education: Vouchers and EITC/EISC 2.0

The Good: For over a year, we have been fighting voucher supporters/special interests and their deep special interest pockets in their attempt to push a voucher program that would send taxpayer dollars to private institutions. There is no evidence of success and no accountability or transparency for these public funds and the majority of the money would likely go to students already enrolled in private schools. Understanding that voters of Pennsylvania strongly oppose such a program, these special interests—and the legislators they fund—settled for an expansion of a program that already exists. The funding was capped at \$50 million and although it does draw money from the state budget, it won't be subtracted from the basic education line item.

The Bad: This program expansion (EITC increases and EISC) are really kind of "back door vouchers" and they do re-direct funding away from our general revenues and limits funds that could be used to prevent other cuts.

CHARTERS

The Good: Instituting a "statewide authorizer" for charter schools was a budget priority for Governor Corbett, but he lost that fight. A statewide authorizing entity would have removed local control and input on the creation of charter schools in local school districts, all the while leaving local taxpayers with the responsibility to pay for them. Legislators heard the concerns of their constituents, including the need for thorough updating to charter school law that isn't rushed through at the last minute, and public involvement helped ensure that the bad elements of the proposal were not passed.

The Bad: Since the proposed policy included some bad provisions, a number of needed updates to current policy were not made; including fixes to the current funding structure. Charter schools are part of the public education landscape and we need sensible reform to fix the flawed funding structure, to promote fairness, transparency and accountability, to make sure communities have a say, and to allow charters to fulfill their mission. Moving forward, we will need to continue our fight against a statewide authorizer and in urging our legislators to enact real charter school funding reform.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Good: Legislation (SB 1115) promoting the equitable distribution of special education funding actually passed both chambers and created an important conversation about this issue. As a result of the process and excellent work done by both advocates and legislative champions, more legislators deepened their understanding of how special education funding works.

The Bad: SB 1115 was held hostage during negotiations. In the fall it will be imperative to make sure that our legislators move this legislation forward, unencumbered by other issues, and start providing equitable funding to PA's neediest students.

This budget season is a great example of how your voices have an impact on state policy. Thank you for the many thousands of calls and emails you sent to your legislators in the last few months. Most importantly, thank you for the continuous support you've given to the students of Pennsylvania to help ensure sure that they receive an opportunity to learn!

The Danger of a Poor Education

The correlation between Education and Crime in today's society

Education is critical in ensuring the nation's success. Unfortunately, our system is not fully providing the education students need to succeed, thus the nation is forced to address economic and social consequences. Recent studies indicate that a poor education can lead to a steep increase in criminal behavior and the expense of incarcerating an individual greatly outweighs the cost of providing an education for the same person. During a time when crime prevention and a decrease in spending are high on the political agenda, investing in sound education policy simply makes sense. Receiving an adequate education is a civil right and a matter of public safety. Below are recent findings regarding the correlation between education and crime.

- Lower educational attainment levels increase the likelihood that individuals, particularly males, will be arrested and/or incarcerated.ⁱ
- A ten percent increase in the male graduation rate would reduce murder and assault arrest rates by about 20 percent, motor vehicle theft by 13 percent, and arson by 8 percentⁱⁱ
- State prison inmates without a high school diploma and those with a GED were more likely to be repeat offenders than those with a diplomaⁱⁱⁱ
- In 2001, there were 37,105 individuals under state custody, which cost \$1,203,219,000. (This level of expenditure places Pennsylvania behind only New York among northeast states for total expenditures, and seventh in the nation.)^{iv}
- The average annual education cost per student in a PA public school is \$9,500^v
- Over a third of jail inmates said the main reason they quit school was because of academic problems, behavior problems, or lost interest^{vi}
- Increasing the high school completion rate by just 1 percent for all men ages 20-60 would **save** the U.S. up to **\$1.4 billion** per year in reduced costs from crime.^{vii}
- Preschool programs create economic benefits—including reduced costs of crime, drug use and teen parenting—that range as high as **\$7 for each dollar** invested^{viii}
- A one-year increase in average years of schooling for dropouts would **reduce murder** and assault by almost **30 percent**, motor vehicle theft by 20 percent, arson by 13 percent, and burglary and larceny by about 6 percent^{ix}

These facts and figures provide insight into one of many reasons why public education is a worthwhile investment. With high crime rates and a strained economy, public education must be a priority to avoid some of the palpable effects facing the country today. By providing a better education for our children we provide these students with the tools to function successfully in society.