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Level Up Coalition Launches Effort to Increase Funding for 100 Severely Underfunded PA School Districts

PA Rep. Schlossberg Introduces HB 1167 to Aid PA's Most Under-Resourced Schools

HARRISBURG (April 15, 2021) – Level Up, a coalition of more than a dozen education advocacy organizations from across the commonwealth, launched a campaign today to increase state funding for the 100 most underfunded school districts in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania ranks 44th in the nation for state share of funding for K-12 education and has some of the nation's widest gaps between wealthy and poor school districts.

"It is no secret that hundreds of public schools across the commonwealth are grossly underfunded as a result of Pennsylvania's property tax scheme and chronic underfunding at the state level," said Rep. Mike Schlossberg. "The entire approach is unfair. It burdens taxpayers, threatens to leave students and families behind, and makes the difficult work of teachers almost impossible." Rep. Schlossberg (D-Allentown) introduced [House Bill 1167](#) on April 14 to support the most underfunded districts.

Due to chronic underfunding at the state level, school districts across Pennsylvania must rely on local wealth – property taxes – to fund their schools. Communities with a robust local tax base can raise sufficient funding to meet students' needs, while students living in poor districts go without essential resources, even despite high property tax efforts.

"The Level Up plan is a way to help students and communities who are footing the bill but not reaping the benefits," said Rep. Schlossberg. "Across the 100 Level Up districts, this additional money can be used to hire more educators, upgrade schools built more than a century ago, and provide 21st century technology. If we truly believe that education is the great equalizer, then we have to fund education equally."

Thousands of Pennsylvania students attend schools that lack the resources needed to ensure that they can succeed. The wealthiest school districts spend, on average, \$4,800 more per student than the poorest, and that gap has grown steadily wider.

The Level Up coalition's goal is to shrink the large gap between the resources schools have and what they need. The growing disparity among Pennsylvania's wealthy and poor districts creates enormous inequity,

leaving an entire generation of children in poor districts ill-prepared for the challenges and demands of tomorrow impacting local future workforce, tax base, and the state's economy.

House Bill 1167 spells out a mechanism for identifying the 100 most underfunded school districts and commits to allocating a supplemental pot of funds to these schools annually to help narrow the state's vast disparities in funding.

Even though this bill targets only 20% of Pennsylvania's school districts, these 100 districts serve 65% of Pennsylvania's Black students, 58% of Pennsylvania's Latinx students, 58% of Pennsylvania's students in poverty, 64% of Pennsylvania's English learners, 35% of Pennsylvania's students with disabilities, and 32% of Pennsylvania's total student population.

"Every child in Pennsylvania deserves robust course choices, class sizes that allow for personalized support, enough school counselors and nurses to meet their needs, and a safe learning environment so they can thrive and succeed in school today and live productive, fulfilling lives after graduation," said Susan Spicka, executive director of Education Voters PA and a member of the Level Up coalition. "But Pennsylvania is failing a large portion of its student population by ignoring the inequity created by lack of state funding, coupled with its property tax funding scheme."

"We know that when we give our students adequate resources, they do better – they can thrive," said Tomea Sippio-Smith, education policy director for Public Citizens for Children and Youth, another member of the Level Up coalition. "Although it alone doesn't solve the funding crisis, Level Up moves the needle substantially for the 100 school districts with the fewest resources – and for the students in the communities they serve."

"School districts such as Sto-Rox, with a high concentration of poverty, experience the greatest gaps in educational funding," said Frank Dalmas, superintendent of the Sto-Rox School District. "Pennsylvania policymakers are the greatest single factor that can either eliminate this inequity or allow it to continue. In the case of Sto-Rox School District, Pennsylvania legislators have chosen to allow this inequity to continue and avoided investing resources into a district where students have the most uncertain futures."

"The large gap between the resources schools have and what they need leaves an entire generation of students at risk of not being prepared for the future," said parent and school board member Robin Goodson of the School District of Lancaster. "The most underfunded districts serve a disproportionate share of the commonwealth's students of color, students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and English learners. At the current rate of increases in state educational spending, it will take decades or more for the most underfunded districts to reach adequate funding. Our children cannot wait."

The partner organizations comprising the Level Up coalition include ACLAMO, CASA, Education Law Center, Education Rights Network, Education Voters PA, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, Make the Road Pennsylvania, One Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, Public Citizens for Children and Youth, Public Interest Law Center, Teach Plus Pennsylvania, and the Urban League of Philadelphia.

For more information and a full list of the 100 Level Up school districts, please visit leveluppa.org.

The Level Up coalition believes that every child in Pennsylvania deserves robust course choices, class sizes that allow for personalized support, enough school counselors and nurses, and a safe learning environment so they can thrive and succeed in school today and live productive, fulfilling lives after graduation.

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