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GOVERNOR TOM WOLF CELEBRATES HISTORIC LEVEL UP FUNDING IN PA BUDGET

Wolf, Local Leaders Mark 2022-23 Education Funding Increase

Erie, PA (August 8, 2022) — Level Up supporters joined Governor Tom Wolf at Northwest Pennsylvania Collegiate Academy in Erie today to celebrate the \$225 million Level Up funding supplement increase as part of the 2022–23 budget agreement. Level Up funding helps move the state’s 100 school districts that have the greatest student need and the fewest resources further along the long road toward adequate funding. Level Up school districts in Erie County include Erie’s Public Schools, Northwestern, and Girard School Districts.

“I promised the people of Pennsylvania that I would make education and the future of our children a priority again for the commonwealth. And I have fought every day to do just that,” Governor Wolf said. “This year’s budget includes a massive investment in our kids, our schools, and our future. It’s also an investment that could free up local communities to reduce property taxes.”

In proposing this year’s state budget, after intense advocacy by the members of the Level Up coalition and school district leaders, the Governor embraced the Coalition’s proposal, which with legislative support was a key mechanism for allocating \$750 million in additional funds to school districts in the budget. Level Up school districts benefitted from a double dose of funds allocated via the Fair Funding Formula.

The Level Up schools educate 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.

The Level Up Coalition is a statewide partnership of thirteen organizations that, for the last two years, have singularly focused on accelerating the pace of closing the state school funding gap between the districts that have sufficient resources and those that are the lowest spending in the state. Within months of forming the coalition in 2021, it succeeded in getting HB 1167 introduced

and passed. The bill spelled out a mechanism for identifying the 100 most underfunded school districts and allocating a supplemental pot of \$100 million to these schools to help narrow the state's vast disparities in funding.

“Governor Wolf’s commitment to Level Up funding is powerful recognition that inequity among Pennsylvania school districts must be addressed,” said Kate Philips, Level Up Coalition spokesperson. “This funding, which slowly begins to level the playing field, temporarily eases the burden that superintendents, school boards, and educators – and students – in rural, urban, and suburban school districts are faced with every day due to chronic funding disparities.”

The recently concluded Pennsylvania school funding trial laid bare the fact that the commonwealth has one of the most inequitable and inadequately funded public school systems in America. Pennsylvania contributes just 38% of the costs of k-12 education. Only seven states cover a smaller share. The national average is 47%. Erie Public School’s gap this year, prior to this budget being enacted, was over \$63 million, or \$4,900 per student - among the highest gaps in the state.

Urban, rural, and suburban school districts alike are all impacted by chronic underfunding and the students attending those schools do not have the same opportunities as students living in wealthier districts.

As a result of years of 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, despite high property tax efforts.

The Level Up coalition is committed to addressing 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 underfunded districts ill-prepared for college, career, and the real-world challenges of adulthood.

The partner organizations comprising the Level Up coalition include ACLAMO, CASA, Children First (formerly known as Public Citizens for Children and Youth), Education Law Center, Education Rights Network, Education Voters of PA, Make the Road Pennsylvania, One Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, Public Interest Law Center, Teach Plus Pennsylvania, and the Urban League of Philadelphia.

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.

For more information, please visit <https://leveluppa.org/>.

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