



NEWS RELEASE

April 21, 2017

CONTACT:
Steve Robinson
Senior Director of Communication
717-506-2450, ext. 3315

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 A.M., APRIL 24.

2016-17 State of Education highlights success/challenges facing public education

Representatives of several education leadership associations today released the 2016-17 State of Education report highlighting the many successes and challenges facing public education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This 72-page document (<https://www.psba.org/report/state-education-report/>) covers a vast array of statistics gathered from data available from public sources, as well as responses from a survey sent to all school districts, career and technology centers, and intermediate units in the state in December 2016. The report delves into school finances, student achievement, budget pressures and teacher shortages, to name a few. This year's report will establish a baseline which can be used moving forward to show changes and trends over time.

Some key findings:

Survey respondents identified the top three challenges facing education as budget pressures (86%), bargaining issues (39%) and school construction/maintenance (26%). While pension costs (85%), charter school payments (66%) and inadequate state funding (53%) were identified as the top budget pressures.

The State of Education report also captures the huge disparities in funding between the richest and poorest districts and the unfortunate impacts of this disparity on student achievement. There was a 32.6% difference in the average 8th grade PSSA proficiency between districts with the highest and lowest poverty and a 35.2% difference in 4th grade PSSA proficiency.



While Pennsylvania ranks 12th nationally in terms of the amount of spending per student, it ranks near the bottom at 46 when looking at the amount of funding coming from the state, leaving local taxpayers to fill the void. Despite the challenges, investments in education do show dividends in student performance. When looking at the percentage of students advanced or proficient in reading and math, the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows Pennsylvania tied 7th in 4th grade reading and tied 9th in 4th grade math; tied 6th in 8th grade reading and tied 13th in 8th grade math.

Organizations partnering in this effort to release the inaugural State of Education Report are Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA), Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units (PAIU), Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA), Pennsylvania Principals Association, and Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA).

“PACTA believes that the state of career and technical education in the state is strong and is serving both students and employers well. There are, however, many challenges facing career and technical centers as they prepare students to support the economic growth of the commonwealth. The funding issues that are facing the rest of public education are also impacting career and technical schools,” said Jackie Cullen, PACTA executive director.

“If we measure both the successes and challenges of public education, we are in a better position to find solutions that will make a difference for children,” said Tom Gluck, PAIU executive director. “Ultimately, this is why The State of Education Report is important and why PAIU is pleased to be a partner in the effort.”

“While political leaders and pundits will claim that our public schools are receiving more state funds today than in the past, they fail to explain that most of the new dollars that have been sent to school districts over the past few years have gone directly to mandated cost such as pension contributions and increased cyber-school costs, not to the classroom,” said Dr. Mark DiRocco, PASA executive director.

“Since 2008, schools have faced dwindling state funding while costs in health care, pensions, charter schools, and everyday expenses have escalated,” said Dr. Paul Healey, PA Principals Association executive director. “In spite of these challenges, our teachers and school leaders, day in and day out, continue to meet the needs of the learners under their care. They know and understand that every child deserves a quality education no matter where they live.”

“Too often the focus on public education is negative,” said PSBA Executive Director Nathan Mains. “The common refrain is that public schools are overspending and underproducing when in reality, Pennsylvania’s public schools have consistently high rankings on national assessments, graduation rates close to 90% and more than 70% of students continuing on to a postsecondary education. More must be done, however, to erase the disparities and inequalities that exist between the wealthiest and the poorest districts.”

###

PSBA is a nonprofit statewide association of public school boards, pledged to the highest ideals of local lay leadership for the public schools of the commonwealth. Founded in 1895, PSBA was the first school boards association established in the United States.