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Governor Corbett's Education Budget Provides Flexibility, Accountability

Harrisburg - Governor Tom Corbett today outlined his 2012-13 budget, continuing his call to reform the education system by providing financial flexibility to local school districts, while ensuring the accountability of teachers and school leaders.

"This budget will provide school districts across Pennsylvania the flexibility that is needed in these difficult economic times," Secretary of Education Ron Tomalis said, while increasing funding for basic education.

"Taxpayers expect their government to eliminate burdensome, duplicative services and relieve state mandates that often drive up the cost of doing business," Tomalis said. "This education proposal will provide the mechanisms that school districts need to ensure that quality academic programs continue to be accessible to children across Pennsylvania."

Governor Corbett's education budget proposes development and implementation of a Pennsylvania School Report Card to provide for greater accountability. This new accountability system would assess public school districts and public schools, including career and technical centers, charter schools and cyber charter schools.

The Department of Education will invest \$3.7 million, combined with additional federal funds, to implement a new teacher and principal evaluation tool. The educator evaluation program will incorporate measures of teacher practice, as well as multiple measures of student achievement. This information will provide support and feedback to educators, while increasing the number of highly effective teachers in the classroom.

This budget allocates \$15.4 million to implement Keystone Exams, which are rigorous, end-of-course assessments for high school students. The number of exams will be reduced from 10 to three and the requirement for them to be factored into a course grade will be eliminated. However, beginning in 2017, successful completion of the Keystone Exam or a project-based alternate will be required for graduation from high school.

In addition, the governor's budget commits \$1.7 million in state and federal funds to improve data collection. A more accurate accounting of student attendance will help the state's education financing.

"These initiatives go to the heart of the governor's commitment to providing quality academic programs for all students across Pennsylvania," Tomalis said. "Taxpayers invest a significant amount of money in the public education system. The governor's focus is to ensure taxpayers are receiving a return on their investment."

Components of the proposed education budget include:

- Block granting the majority of funding for basic education to school districts by consolidating Basic Education Funding, Pupil Transportation, Nonpublic and Charter School Pupil Transportation, and School Employees' Social Security into one line item known as the Student Achievement Education Block Grant. This line item will total \$6.51 billion, which is an increase of \$21.8 million over the same line items in the current 2011-12 budget.
- Providing flexibility to local decision-makers regarding how to best meet the broad requirements in the areas of school transportation, school staffing and federal law.
- Repealing burdensome bureaucratic processes, eliminating certain categorical reporting, rewarding academic excellence and providing relief from administrative reporting, such as strategic plans.

"We must reform our education system to provide broad flexibility to school districts," Tomalis said. "If we remain resistant to change and do not make the decisions that are necessary to secure our future, our economy will suffer and we will be less competitive on a global scale."

Governor Corbett also announced today the formation of an Advisory Commission on Postsecondary Education to study Pennsylvania's postsecondary education, and make recommendations on how to make it accessible and affordable to students and fair to the state's taxpayers.

This commission will be comprised of leaders in education and business, along with individuals and representatives of other organizations with relevant expertise.

"We are nearing a paradigm shift in higher education," Tomalis said. "We need to explore all areas of postsecondary education to ensure that it remains student-focused and is capable of meeting the demands to train the future workforce."

The budget plan also provides funding for higher education and libraries, including:

- Early childhood education programs will receive a total of \$320.2 million, including \$78.6 million for Pre-K Counts, \$206.1 million for Early Intervention and \$35.4 million for Head Start Supplemental Assistance.
- Creation of a Targeted Industry Cluster Certificate Program in partnership with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency to provide grants to students who enroll in programs for high-priority occupations.
- The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency will receive \$361.9 million to provide grants to students attending college.
- The state's 14 community colleges will be provided a total of \$221.9 million.
- More than \$367.8 million is slated for state-related universities, including the Pennsylvania State University (\$194.6 million, a 1.6 percent decrease of its operating budget), Temple University (\$97.9 million, a 1.8 percent decrease of its operating budget), University of Pittsburgh (\$95.4 million, a 2.1 percent decrease of its operating budget) and Lincoln University (level funded at \$11.16 million).
- Funding for the Pennsylvania College of Technology and Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology will be level-funded.

- The State System of Higher Education, which operates the 14 state-owned universities, will receive a total of \$330.2 million (a 3.8 percent decrease of its operating budget).
- Public libraries will receive \$50.8 million.

"Pennsylvania is home to unique educational opportunities and Governor Corbett's budget reaffirms his commitment to ensure that Pennsylvania citizens continue to have access to quality programs and services in their communities," Tomalis said. "This budget realigns our thinking by focusing on what is in the best interest of students."

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