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Erie School District Superintendent Brian Polito joins 60 Superintendents Urging Legislators to Invest in Level Up

Bipartisan Support for HB 2414, SB 1223 Help Under-Resourced Schools

HARRISBURG (June 13, 2022) – Erie Public Schools Superintendent Brian Polito is one of 60 Pennsylvania school superintendents expressing his support for legislation that would make a significant dent in Pennsylvania’s school funding gap. The legislation has strong bipartisan support in the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

Level Up — first approved in the 2021-22 Pennsylvania budget — targets funding to the 100 school districts that have the greatest student need and the fewest resources. Gov. Wolf’s budget proposal includes a \$300 million allocation for the program.

“A lack of funding perpetuates an unlevel playing field that places unfair barriers on our students’ educational success,” said Brian Polito. “For the students charting their future through Pennsylvania’s inequitably funded 500 school districts, Level Up funding doesn’t solve the problem, but it does move the needle in the right direction.”

Education advocates from the Level Up campaign took to the halls of the Capitol on May 24, and delivered [a letter to legislators signed by 60 superintendents](#) — including Superintendent Polito — from across the commonwealth urging for the inclusion of Governor Wolf’s proposed \$300 million in Level Up funding, which has bipartisan support, in the final PA state budget.

The Level Up campaign, a coalition of more than a dozen education advocacy organizations from across the commonwealth, also announced its support of [HB 2414](#), introduced by PA Rep. Mike Schlossberg (D-Lehigh), and Level Up policy outline in [SB 1223](#), introduced by PA Sen. Timothy Kearney (D-Delaware/Chester) to increase state funding for the 100 school districts

furthest from adequacy in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania ranks 45th 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. Last year, Rep. Schlossberg introduced Level Up legislation that was written into law last June.

"When our Pennsylvania students have a strong education, they are equipped with the tools they need to reach their full potential and become thriving, engaged citizens — a well-educated workforce benefits our overall economy and helps our state prosper," said Rep. Schlossberg. "Still, we continually fail our students and teachers by not adequately funding the poorest school districts, ultimately burdening local taxpayers and continually leaving superintendents, students, and teachers to fend for themselves."

"A serious investment is necessary to solve the school funding crisis in Pennsylvania and passing HB 2414 is a good step in the right direction."

As a result of 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, despite high property tax efforts.

A recently concluded trial in Commonwealth Court challenging the constitutionality of Pennsylvania's school funding system highlighted the impact of limited state funding on students in Pennsylvania's low-wealth districts — urban, rural, and suburban. Level Up would accelerate funding to the school districts that have been most impacted by decades of underfunding, and along with a proposed \$1.25 billion increase in basic education funding, it would help to fill an estimated \$4.6 billion education funding gap.

"Our most underserved students are paying the price for the large funding hole that Pennsylvania legislators continue to ignore each year," said Level Up coalition member Deborah Gordon Klehr, executive director of the Education Law Center-PA. "The historic \$300 million Level Up supplement can begin to help to address the enormous inequities between Pennsylvania's high-wealth and low-wealth districts and start to chip away at the vast \$4.6 billion adequacy gap."

"Every child deserves to learn in an adequately funded public school district, but right now that's not the case," said Level Up coalition member Susan Spicka, executive director of Education Voters. "The Level Up initiative delivers much needed funding to our 100 most underfunded school districts — urban, rural, and suburban — an urgent down payment toward adequacy and equity."

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.

Both House Bill 2414 and Senate Bill 1223 spell out a mechanism for identifying the 100 most underfunded school districts and commit to allocating a supplemental pot of funds to these schools annually to help narrow the state's vast disparities in funding.

Even though these bills target only 20% of Pennsylvania's school districts, these 100 districts serve nearly two-thirds of Pennsylvania's Black students and of the state's English learners, more than half of Pennsylvania's Latinx students and students in poverty, about one-third of Pennsylvania's students with disabilities, and one-third of Pennsylvania's total student population.

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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