



**The Opportunity in Front of Us  
Statement on Governor Shapiro’s Budget Address  
March 7th, 2023**

**The Backstory:**

As we learned from the historic Commonwealth Court ruling in February, **every Pennsylvania child has the constitutional right to a quality education. Yet our current system of funding public education**, one that is heavily dependent on local real estate taxes, **means that only some communities are able to “generate enough revenue to meet the needs of their students”** (p. 686).

**These spending gaps have produced huge disparities in learning environments, disparities that we can all see:** in some districts students get small group instruction and social and emotional support, while in other districts each reading specialist and guidance counselor struggles to serve hundreds of children (if those positions are filled at all); in some districts students have current curriculum, supplies, and technology, while in other districts students share old textbooks and lack access to educational tools; in some districts students learn in state-of-the-art facilities, while in other districts students are forced to learn in overcrowded and toxic buildings.

**And these disparities have produced substantial harm:** significant achievement gaps, gaps in career and college readiness, gaps in graduation rates. As the court argued, these are all clear signs that students in lower-wealth districts are denied “a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially and civically” in “a comprehensive, effective and contemporary system of public education” – their constitutional right.

**Where We Stand Now:**

Over the last two years, as federal pandemic relief funds reached schools and as the Commonwealth finally began increasing the Basic Education Funding going to Pennsylvania public schools, we have seen that **when we have more, we can do a lot more.** Districts, many for the first time in decades, were able to invest in curricular materials, hire more reading and math specialists and school counselors, expand advanced coursework and extracurricular

offerings, and address long-overdue facility needs. As the court powerfully argued, “**money does matter**, and economically-disadvantaged students and historically underperforming students can overcome challenges if they have access to the right resources” (p. 717).

**In Governor Shapiro’s address, he recognized the urgent need to tackle education disparities in the Commonwealth, and called on us to come together to fix Pennsylvania’s unconstitutional system for funding public schools.**

**Surprisingly, though**, while the Governor is calling for additional school funding, this funding is only enough to keep up with inflation. And **unlike in the previous few years, the proposed budget neglects to use Level Up or any other mechanism to help our most under-resourced students catch up.**

### **The Opportunity in Front of Us:**

**We believe that this year’s budget discussion presents the chance to make real progress.** It has become overwhelmingly recognized – by this Administration, the Court, the Legislature, and other Stakeholders – that we simply must remedy the deeply unjust disparities in education here in Pennsylvania. **We have a moral and legal obligation to come together with urgency and determination to ensure that every student is provided the education they deserve.**

**This means that the Commonwealth’s 2023-2024 budget *must* go significantly further to direct additional resources to the districts that have been underfunded for decades.**

The opportunity is in front of us. The **elected leaders in Harrisburg** may not be the ones who created these disparities – but they **are the ones who can now do right by our students and properly invest in the future of our Commonwealth.**