

Governor Corbett's 2011-2012 Education Budget (Anticipated) Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ document will be updated following the March 8 briefings, and again, following broader distribution of the podcast. Please direct all questions to RA-BudgetQuestions@state.pa.us.

Line Item Questions – Early Childhood and K-12

1. How does 11-12 BEF compare to 10-11 BEF?

Basic Education Funding in 2011-12 shows an increase in state dollars of \$492,619,000 for a total of \$5,226,142,000, or the equivalent of 08-09 BEF. The difference in overall BEF is a decrease of \$549,944,000 – a difference that would have been much greater given the loss of federally provided State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (\$654,747,000) plus the Education Jobs Funds (\$387,816,000) which are no longer available.

2. How is the BEF going to be distributed?

Each district will receive the state share it received in 10-11 plus the EduJobs share, and will receive a portion of the additional state funds totaling \$104.8 million in accordance with a new formula that takes into account factors such as ELL, poverty, district size, aid ratio and local tax effort. See the “BEF narrative” for more information about the distribution of this portion.

3. What happened to the Accountability Block Grants?

Accountability Block Grants, which have never been acknowledged as a permanent source of funding, have been eliminated with the expectation that districts have been able to determine the value of the programs supported with these funds and prioritize the allocation of their 2011-12 dollars accordingly. Line items specific to early childhood education have been held relatively steady.

4. How did early childhood funding fare in this budget?

Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance have been held relatively constant with about a 2% reduction in both line items.

5. Why did Early Intervention see such a substantial increase?

Early intervention funding from the state is increased by about 9%, which offsets the decrease in ARRA federal funding. A more significant investment in early intervention will help reduce the potential future special education costs in the schools.

6. Why are grants, such as School Improvement and Basic Education Formula Enhancements zeroed out?

These grants are holdovers from the now-expired Empowerment Act and benefitted only a few districts. Instead of separate line items, available funding is concentrated in the basic education subsidy all districts receive.

7. Why did the intermediate unit line item get reduced to zero?

When intermediate unit funds from the state were cut in half in the mid-1990s, IUs responded by becoming much more entrepreneurial. The IUs have survived, and in many cases thrived, during the past 15 years as a result of innovative thinking and cutting-edge practices. But the

administration recognizes that rural IUs with more challenging circumstances may need ongoing support in 2011-12. Therefore, some funding has been dedicated in the PDE General Government Operations line item for PDE to assist the IUs. Other line items that impact IUs, such as special education, early intervention and non-public school services have remained relatively constant.

8. Will the teacher/principal multi-measure teacher evaluation work continue with support from this budget?

Yes, \$800,000 from within the Teacher Professional Development line item is targeted at continuing the efforts currently underway in the five pilot sites to improve the tools and processes associated with teacher and principal evaluations, with the goal of being able to have a valid and reliable tool that can then be used to advance a more student-centered approach to securing and retaining tenure.

9. Will the Standards-Aligned System be supported?

Yes, all elements of the SAS portal will be sustained through the Teacher Professional Development line item.

10. Is the Classrooms for the Future program preserved?

Any future support for Classrooms for the Future may be derived from Title IID funding, which has, in the past, supplemented state funding for this technology integration initiative. There will not be adequate federal funds available to support CFF in the manner it has been funded. Consequently, districts will need to determine how they wish to continue to support the use of technology in classrooms with existing funds.

11. Is the Distinguished Educator program preserved?

No, the Distinguished Educator program will not be supported with state funding. Given the influx of substantial federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding for persistently low performing schools, including roles such as turnaround officers, the Distinguished Educator program is no longer as necessary as it once was.

12. Will funding still be available to support the state's obligations regarding Act 45 and Act 48?

Yes, the Teacher Professional Development line item includes funding for continued support of these two statutory requirements for teacher and administrator continuous professional education.

13. With the substantial reduction in the Teacher Professional Development line, are there any programs that will not be funded?

There is no longer any professional development set aside for the Distinguished Educator program, the Classrooms for the Future program, or the National Board Teacher Certification program.

14. Why is dual enrollment highlighted when there is no line item associated with it?

The Corbett Administration advances the position that all students who have demonstrated achievement of Chapter 4 high school requirements prior to their scheduled graduation be afforded opportunities in which they can gain workforce, community service and/or postsecondary experience before graduating from high school. In so doing, the final years of their K-12 schooling become a more relevant and meaningful learning opportunity. Districts

should strongly consider modifying long-standing, locally-required credit accumulation requirements and allocate their resources in a different manner to create alternative experiences for seniors.

15. What happened to the *Educational Assistance Program* and *Science: It's Elementary* funding?

Categorical spending such as Science: It's Elementary and the Education Assistance Program for tutoring have been eliminated in favor of distributing all available funding more equitably across all school districts.

16. Funding for high school reform has also been eliminated. Why?

Like all of these program cuts, the fiscal situation demands prioritizing allocations. Similarly districts will need to do the same. The expectation is that by now, after multiple years of dedicated resources, districts will have utilized their high school reform (Project 720) funding to redesign their career pathways or other programs that allow students who have demonstrated proficiency in high school subjects to spend their senior year in meaningful and relevant off-campus activities to better prepare them for work and post-secondary education.

17. Reimbursement of charter school expenses to school districts has been eliminated. Why?

Charter school reimbursements to districts have been eliminated in light of the fact that the original reason for this reinstatement of funding to school districts has expired. This funding was predicated on the initial impact of charter school enrollments, but it is no longer necessary or appropriate to reimburse school districts for students they are not educating.

18. What accounts for the increase in the PA Assessment line item?

The PA Assessment line item includes only the state funding needed to continue the PSSA in grades, 3-8 and 11 (including PSSA-M and PASA), the PVAAS tool, eMetric tool, PAAYP website, and required exams for English Language Learners. The increase includes the cost of funding the Voluntary Model Curriculum and the Classroom Diagnostic Tools, critical elements of supporting the ongoing preparation of students and teachers for the Keystone Exams.

19. So what is happening with the Keystone Exams?

Keystone Exams will be placed on a one-year hold, and this is not just due to the \$20 million cost anticipated for 2011-12. These exams are rigorous and early results from the field tests and Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDTs) indicate that providing schools with an additional year to align their curriculum to this more challenging content is necessary. In addition, the project-based assessment component of the Chapter 4 regulations requires additional time for development and field testing.

20. Why are there no cuts to the CTE line item and the Special Education line item?

The administration recognizes the value of Career and Technical Education programs as an option for engaging all students. In addition, special education supports are vital to the students with the greatest challenges.

21. What accounts for the increase in the Information and Technology Improvement line item?

Previously, the Teacher Professional Development line item included expenses associated with technology tools, and now those expenses have been moved to a more appropriate line item. For example, in addition to the expenses associated with maintaining technology services within PDE, the new TIMS (Teacher Information Management System) which will improve educator

certification services, the eStrategic Plan web-based tool, the PA Technology Inventory (PATI) survey, the use of Eluminate, and any efforts toward School Interoperability Framework (SIF) compliance, have now been consolidated under this line item.

22. Why is there a reduction in the social security reimbursement line item? Is this attributable to the anticipated reduction in the number of teachers that will be employed in light of BEF and other cuts?

No, not entirely. The reduction in this line item represents a change in the manner in which reimbursements will be provided, particularly to districts with aid ratios less than .50.

Reimbursement will occur as follows:

- a. Pay 50% for employees hired before 1994*
- b. Pay at the aid ratio for all employees hired after 1994*

23. What is the safe school initiative that was previously unfunded?

The safe schools line item is for the creation of a PDE-based Office for Safe Schools as required in Act 104 of 2010. With the elimination of federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities funding, the state needs to provide adequate resources to staff a safe schools office and provide supports to the field as required under Act 104.

24. What does the (F) mean next to the items on the first page of the budget?

All funds preceded by the letter (F) indicate the source of funding is federal. Those funds are included here because Pennsylvania law requires all federal funding must be appropriated by the General Assembly before it can be distributed.

25. What does the (A) mean next to the items on the first page of the budget?

The (A) stands for augmentation and represents revenue available to the Department of Education from other funding sources.

Line Item Questions – Higher Education

26. Why are community colleges kept relatively whole compared to state system and state-related schools?

Community colleges are responsible for providing low-cost, high-quality post-secondary programs and degrees to the broadest category of students. Many of the community college programs support workforce development initiatives. The state's statutory obligation to community colleges supersedes its obligation to the State System of Higher Education or the state-related institutions. State system and state-related schools have the ability to modify their expenses and tuition rates to accommodate the decrease in state funds. In addition, data indicates that these schools have substantial endowments that can be used to fund scholarships and capital projects.

Budget Narrative Questions

27. Where did the \$8.6 billion figure come from as referenced on the first page of the budget narrative?

This figure includes all of the proposed funding that provides direct support for public education, including:

- *Basic Education Funding*
- *Career and Technical Education*
- *Authority Rentals and Sinking Fund Requirements*
- *Pupil Transportation*
- *Special Education*
- *Tuition for Orphans and Children placed in Private Homes*
- *Payments in Lieu of Taxes*
- *Education of Migrant Laborers' Children*
- *PA Charter Schools for the Deaf and Blind*
- *Special Education – Approved Private Schools*
- *School Food Services*
- *School Nutrition Incentive Program*
- *School Employees' Social Security*
- *School Employees' Retirement*

28. How is a district to achieve a salary freeze in light of Collective Bargaining Agreements?

The administration encourages districts – school boards, administrators and teachers – to recognize the severity of the economic situation the country, the commonwealth and their local communities are experiencing. And in that context, acknowledge that significant reductions in personnel costs are the means by which a responsible balanced budget can be achieved, given the fact that in most districts personnel costs account for 70-80 percent of expenditures. Reductions in this line item are the result of reduced numbers of staff, retention of staff who receive lower salaries, or reduced salaries of existing staff. The choice remains at the local level. The administration is merely recommending that districts consider all of the options that may be available to them.

29. What is compelling the suggestion to eliminate master salary “bumps”?

Recent research has shown little correlation to advanced degrees and student performance. With the exception of math and science, the master's degree generally has little bearing on whether the students of teachers who hold advanced degrees perform better academically. Consequently, the administration recommends considering all of the incremental salary increases as well as the tuition reimbursement as potential areas for possible reductions in light of the need to prioritize spending where it will achieve the greatest impact.

30. What is the implication of the statement regarding “funding to support students and learning”?

The administration recognizes the value of previous initiatives, such as the Standard & Poor website which provided transparency regarding school funding. The Governor has repeatedly indicated that taxpayer dollars need to be accounted for in a manner that allows citizens to be able to access information about how their money is being spent by the state. Efforts will continue to tie dollars to students with the intent of allowing those dollars to follow the student to a school that is the best choice for that child.