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CONTACT: Kelly Burkholder, klburkholder@lancaster.k12.pa.us
717-587-7266

School District of Lancaster, community leaders urge fair funding for schools

Community leaders doing their part to deliver education, ask lawmakers to quickly resolve differences and deliver the right budget

LANCASTER (Oct. 20, 2015) – During a press conference today at King Elementary, representatives from the School District of Lancaster and community and faith leaders urged lawmakers to pass a state budget that provides equitable funding for public education, and reaffirmed the district's commitment to providing each child with a high-quality education and keeping academic programs intact.

The district supports a budget that increases basic education funding by at least \$410 million to help schools recover from past funding decreases and to begin implementing the funding formula passed unanimously by the bipartisan Basic Education Funding Commission in June.

The state has been without a budget for more than 100 days and the long delay in reaching an agreement is placing even greater burdens on Pennsylvania schools.

Superintendent Damaris Rau told the crowd that the impasse will potentially impact afterschool and early childhood programs, school maintenance and technology needs, and payments to vendors and employees.

"These students and their families are relying on us and we simply cannot maintain our level of programs and opportunities for students unless a change in funding is established," Rau said.

Pennsylvania has the widest funding gap between wealthy and poor school districts of any state in the country, and is one of only three states without a school funding formula.

Rau said the School District of Lancaster's student population has varying needs that must be addressed in the district's allocation of basic education funding. Approximately 18 percent of the population is in special education, 17 percent are English Language Learners – representing 71 countries and 38 foreign languages – and there are 900 homeless students.

"We need to set the bar high across all districts and not jeopardize a child's education based on where they live," said Rau. "Our 'bottom line' has a direct impact on economic, racial and ethnic achievement gaps."

Other community leaders and educators in attendance today included:

- School District of Lancaster Board Vice President Radames Melendez
- Pastor Stephen P. Verkouw, Grace Lutheran Church
- Lancaster City Councilwoman Barbara Wilson
- LEA President Jason Molloy
- Pastor Kurt Strause, Emmanuel Lutheran Church

The press conference was supported by Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY). PCCY is a member of the *Campaign for Fair Education Funding*, a coalition of more than 50 member organizations representing educators, labor, business leaders, faith-based organizations, child advocates, charter schools, traditional public schools, with representatives from rural, urban and growing school districts. Learn more at www.fairfunding.org.

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