



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** A press conference call to discuss the findings of the Terry Madonna Opinion Research poll is scheduled for Tuesday, April 22 at 11 a.m. ET. Call: 605-477-2100, Code: 784884#

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## NEWS RELEASE

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## STATEWIDE SURVEY SHOWS CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EDUCATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NEED FOR CHANGE IN STATE SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### *Public Opinion Describes Disconnect Between Current Policies and Pennsylvania's Needs*

HARRISBURG (April 22, 2014) – At a time when the state's economy is struggling to pick up steam, Pennsylvanians are making strong connections between public education, state funding and economic development according to a new statewide public opinion poll released today.

"While our state's year-over-year job growth sits among the weakest states and the state's contribution to public education funding is below the national average, Pennsylvanians are making connections that state officials have so far missed," said Jim Buckheit, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). "Strong public schools are critical to a strong economy and the investments our state makes should strengthen every community."

Terry Madonna Opinion Research's Spring 2014 Omnibus Survey shows large majorities of registered voters believe public schools have an effect on the economy, the state's investment in public schools should be larger and a school funding formula should be used to ensure fair distribution of state funds to schools in all communities.

"Public education funding must be seen for what it is – an investment in Pennsylvania," said Nathan Mains, executive director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. "Without proper funding, it is becoming increasingly challenging for school directors to balance budgets while maintaining the integrity of educational offerings."

The Terry Madonna Opinion Research Spring 2014 Omnibus Survey findings on education are as follows:

- More than 8 in 10 Pennsylvanians (84%) surveyed said they believe public schools have a "Very Strong" or "Some" effect on economic development;

- Nearly three quarters of Pennsylvanians (71%) surveyed said they believe the state investment in public schools needs to be “Much Larger” or “Somewhat Larger”;
- More than two-thirds of Pennsylvanians (67%) said schools with greater number of students in poverty should “Definitely” or “Probably” receive more state funding;
- Nearly three quarters of Pennsylvanians (72%) said they “Strongly Favor” or “Somewhat Favor” using a school funding formula to ensure fair distribution of funding;
- Nearly three quarters of Pennsylvanians (72%) said “Definitely Yes” or “Probably Yes” to using a school funding formula to ensure fair distribution of state education funding.

These issues could not be more important. With big changes underway for education in Pennsylvania, a fair, predictable process for distributing state education funding is needed to adequately meet the needs of all schools. Public school students and educators are learning a new curriculum based on higher standards – Pennsylvania Core – and Keystone exams are becoming indicators of a student’s progress toward graduation and a reflection of the perceived quality of a community’s schools.

Pennsylvania is rolling out a new teacher and principal evaluation system, which requires additional opportunities for training and improvement. Improvements in teaching and learning have the potential for broad and positive impacts statewide. However, uneven basic education funding could yield uneven results.

“Built upon a patchwork of annually changing supplemental formulas with inconsistent targets for additional support, current basic education funding results in an unpredictable distribution of dollars to school districts across the Commonwealth. This distribution only exacerbates the challenges of budget planning from year to year. We need a funding system that is built on reliable, known and verifiable data that supports long term and consistent budgeting” said Jay Himes, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO).

Pennsylvania school officials also are holding off on construction projects during the state’s moratorium on reimbursements for renovations and new building projects, compounding the operational budget challenges. No projects have been added to the school construction pipeline since October 2012 and Gov. Tom Corbett proposed extending the moratorium through June 30, 2015. Without changes, the existing process threatens to drive up local property taxes, force school boards to cut more from educational programs, and hamper economic growth.

“Some of the oldest school buildings in the state are in rural communities where students are preparing for the future without modern tools for teaching and learning. Schools in every community deserve adequate support for a great education that allows students to stay and rebuild or reinvent their local economies,” said Joe Bard, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools.

Statewide, Pennsylvanians said education funding and adequate state support for all schools should be greater priorities in the state's budget.

"Central and western Pennsylvania deserve the same support and opportunities as all other parts of the state, which depends on changes to ensure adequate funding for all public schools," said Dr. J. Hugh Dwyer, Chair of the Central Pa. Education Coalition. "School leaders and parents see the inequities in state support for education and are expressing their beliefs that changes are needed to ensure a better future for their children and communities."

The survey was designed to be representative of the state's registered voter population. It involved telephone interviews with 800 adults between February 10-20, 2014. The telephone poll was conducted using statewide voter registration lists and reflects the opinions of Democrats and Republicans, parents, and residents living in every region of the state. It has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents.

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