

Education Recap



Jan. 9 – 15, 2026

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SESSION STATUS

At 12:04 p.m. on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, the House met briefly in non-voting session and now stands adjourned until Monday, January 26, 2026, at 12:00 p.m., unless sooner recalled by the Speaker.

At 12:31 p.m. on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, the Senate recessed until Monday, January 26, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. unless sooner recalled by the President Pro Tempore.

UPCOMING SESSION DAYS

House

Jan. 26-28
Feb. 2-4
March 23-25
April 13-15, 27-29
May 4-6
June 1-3, 8-10, 15-17, 22-30
Sept. 28-30
Oct. 5-7, 19-21
Nov. 9, 10

Senate

Jan. 26-28
Feb. 2-4
March 16-18, 23-25
April 20-22
May 4-6
June 1-3, 8-10, 22-26, 29-30

The Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education-related legislation in Pennsylvania state government, as compiled and edited by PLS. Additional information, including video, transcript and testimony, is available to [PLSGovTrac](https://www.pslgovtrac.com) users. For more information, contact sales@mypls.com.

Press Conferences

PLS coverage of Capitol events including press conferences, bill signings and media availabilities

No press conferences this week.

Committee News

Comprehensive coverage of the House & Senate public hearings and voting meetings

Senate Republican Policy Committee

*01/12/2026, 2:00 p.m., Daniel Boone Middle School, 1848 Weavertown Rd., Douglassville
Pennsylvania Legislative Services*

The committee held a public hearing on improving reading performance in schools.

Due to technical difficulties, opening remarks from Chair Dave Argall (R-Schuylkill), Sen. Tracy Pennycuick (R-Berks), Shane Cross, director of Curriculum and Instruction, Daniel Boone Area School District and Dr. Katie Kennedy-Reilly, director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Technology K-12, Souderton Area School District, were missed.

Ryan Oxenford, director of curriculum and educational programs, Pottstown School District, shared insights into the district's demographics, challenges and strategies for improvement. He highlighted the high poverty rate, diverse student body and underfunding issues, while emphasizing efforts to enhance student behavior and academic performance. Oxenford discussed the limitations of standardized tests in measuring student literacy and proficiency and the impact of factors like attendance and transiency on student achievement. He cautioned against placing undue pressure on teachers and advocated focusing on reasonable growth and supporting teachers. Oxenford warned about the potential negative consequences of focusing too much on increasing the percentage of students proficient in reading, which might lead to prioritizing students close to proficiency over those significantly behind. He argued for realistic measures, timely data and sustained support to improve reading outcomes.

Dr. Daniel Richards, director of the office of professional learning, Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), discussed the role of intermediate units (IUs) in supporting Pennsylvania schools, highlighting their support through professional learning, technical assistance and state initiative implementation. He emphasized the challenges of educator shortages and funding limitations, the importance of coherent standards and high-quality materials and advocated for sustained professional learning and early intervention.

Dr. Donna Gaffney, director of organizational and professional learning, Montgomery County Intermediate Unit (MCIU), emphasized the importance of early literacy development and the challenges faced by children with disabilities, English learners or those impacted by poverty or trauma. She advocated for increased funding for early intervention programs and stressed the importance of sustained, job-embedded professional learning. Gaffney highlighted the role of IUs in supporting districts and urged funding for early childhood programs and professional learning.

Sen. Pennycuick inquired about the evidence supporting the effectiveness of structured literacy and the signs of success observed in its implementation. Kennedy-Reilly emphasized the importance of using a universal screener and ongoing progress monitoring in literacy assessment. She argued against expecting more than a year's growth in a year and advocated for evaluating students based on their growth trajectory. Sen. Pennycuick discussed the importance of integrating Pre-Kindergarten into the K-12 education system and the impact of early education on children's learning and development. She expressed her desire for universally funded Pre-K education and mentioned legislative efforts to address truancy issues. Sen. Pennycuick asked whether school districts communicate and share effective strategies with each other. Kennedy-Reilly confirmed that districts do share insights on what works and what doesn't, both within MCIU and beyond, through job-alike sessions and regional and statewide conversations.

Sen. Pennycuick asked if districts can collaborate on curriculum purchases to benefit from economies of scale. Gaffney explained that while curriculum needs vary across districts, consortium purchases are made to save funds. Richards added that consortium purchases extend to a larger scale across the state, allowing for significant cost savings.

Chair Argall expressed curiosity about measuring student learning effectively and questioned the impact of a new teaching method highlighted in the New York Times as "revolutionary." Kennedy-Reilly emphasized the importance of quality teaching and a structured literacy approach for effective reading instruction. Gaffney stressed refining literacy instruction strategies based on research and supporting teachers in using assessments effectively. Cross discussed the evolution of teaching methods, highlighting the adaptation of educators to current research and understanding, particularly in the reintroduction of phonics.

Chair Argall shared his initial skepticism about the necessity of computers in education and how technology could have improved his learning experience.

Ashley Chambers, senior vice president of community impact, United Way Berks County, discussed the importance of addressing literacy gaps before kindergarten and detailed two key programs, Growing Readers and Read Alliance, focusing on early childhood and elementary school literacy. She emphasized the economic and educational benefits of early literacy and called for predictable funding, cross-system coordination and flexibility to adapt programs to local needs.

Ryan Breisch, executive director, Literacy Council of Reading-Berks, discussed the role of the council in addressing adult literacy issues in Pennsylvania, emphasizing the importance of literacy and digital skills in today's economy. He shared a success story of a single mother who advanced her career with the council's support and urged for continued legislative support for adult literacy funding.

Sen. Pennycuick expressed admiration for a program impacting teens and asked about the current enrollment, as well as the program's capacity for more participants, and if there was a waiting list. Chambers explained that their program, operating in cohorts, does not have a waiting list and currently serves up to 25 teens paired with 40 younger children in nine elementary schools. She highlighted the program's 25-year history in New York and its expansion in Pennsylvania, noting it could grow with more resources while maintaining the balance of teens to littles. Sen. Pennycuick asked how to assist someone not proficient in reading to adapt to the digital world, referencing her own challenges with technology. Breisch acknowledged the difficulty and discussed the North Star program's role in improving digital literacy through initial screenings and individualized plans, with a digital navigator helping individuals identify and address their learning needs. Sen. Pennycuick inquired about the typical age range of adults facing digital literacy challenges. Breisch responded that they work with individuals aged 18 to 64, mostly females. Chambers mentioned the digital coalition's efforts since 2020 to enhance digital literacy with support from various organizations, highlighting the library's significant role in offering one-on-one assistance and the distribution of laptops from the state to improve internet access and digital skills.

Chair Argall discussed the importance of workforce development and shared his personal experience as an adult learner. He inquired about the application of the "Mississippi Miracle" model to adult education. Breisch and Chambers both mentioned they were not familiar with the "Mississippi miracle" model's application to adult education. Chair Argall expressed frustration with the slow legislative process and the importance of quick results, as demonstrated by Mississippi's success.

Rachel Langan, senior education policy analyst, Commonwealth Foundation, provided an overview of her organization's work and goals in education policy and provided statistics surrounding literacy levels among the counties. She suggested that Pennsylvania take advantage of the educational improvement tax credit (EITC) and the opportunity scholarship tax credit (OSTC) as means to address inequities.

Candace Hall, board member, International Dyslexia Association-Pennsylvania, stressed the importance of evidence-based reading instruction in Pennsylvania schools, citing Mississippi's literacy success as a model. She called for a statewide implementation roadmap, investment in professional learning, leadership alignment and establishing guardrails for high-quality instruction across all zip codes to turn policy into practice.

Rachael Garnick, PA Coalition Manager, Teach Plus Pennsylvania, emphasized the need for funding, implementation and leadership to improve reading proficiency, highlighting the decline in reading proficiency among fourth graders and significant racial and socioeconomic gaps. She advocated for a \$50 million investment for training, coaching and high-quality instructional materials and for empowering the Department of Education (PDE) to lead statewide efforts.

Dr. Kendall LaPora, senior research associate, Research for Action, discussed the importance of structured, science-based reading instruction and the necessity of implementation, access to science-aligned curriculum and professional support for educators. She highlighted the teacher shortage in literacy roles and recommended investing in professional learning, supporting teacher recruitment and retention and expanding access to high-quality tutoring and intervention.

Sen. Pennycuick inquired about the impact of the \$10,000 stipend under the Grow PA initiative on student teachers' ability to afford living expenses during their teaching practice. She mentioned not having met a student teacher who has taken the stipend and expressed strong support for the program designed to assist aspiring teachers with college expenses to avoid significant student debt. She also asked about the next priority for legislators, given that the requirement for structured literacy is already in place. Garnick discussed the effectiveness and competitive nature of the stipend program for educators, pointing out the issue with educator preparation programs not being based on the science of reading and using outdated curricular materials. She mentioned an upcoming state board hearing aimed at aligning teacher certification and licensure exams with the science of reading. LaPora highlighted the importance of coordinated leadership at the PDE-level to improve the implementation of educational initiatives, making them a cohesive movement rather than disjointed efforts. Hall emphasized the need for strong leadership and expertise within the department to support the state's 500-plus school districts, acknowledging the challenges of this task and the necessity for a collaborative approach. Langan proposed changing the funding model for education to allow for more flexibility, suggesting that funding should follow the student to enable those not succeeding in their current schools to find success elsewhere more rapidly.

Chair Argall shared insights into the challenges children face without home support, using his son's success due to parental intervention as an example.

Sen. Pennycuick shared her personal experience with teaching her children to read using phonics and the success it brought, expressing her passion for children's literacy and her enthusiasm for working with panelists to improve education in Pennsylvania. She also reflected on the benefits of moving her children from public to private school and the importance of support at home for children's education, praising the military for providing educational opportunities beyond a general education degree (GED).

Chair Argall discussed the appeal of the Mississippi model for education, acknowledging Pennsylvania's partial adoption of the model and expressing openness to further exploration. He thanked Sen. Pennycuick for initiating the discussion and announced plans to share the testimony with Senate colleagues, particularly those on the Senate Education Committee.



Bullet.in.Points

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: RECENT ACTIONS DURING THE 2025 REGULAR SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly released a summary of recent actions taken during the 2025 Regular Session. Additional information is available on the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

Cosponsor Memos

HCO2995 - Delaying Secondary School Start Times

Sponsor

Rep. Jill N. Cooper (R)

Summary

Authorizes Pennsylvania school entities to voluntarily adopt later start times for secondary schools, and permits funding from the School Safety and Mental Health Grant Program to be used to alleviate costs associated with the planning, implementation or operation of a later school start time

Intro Date

01/12/2026

Last Action

01/12/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

HCO2999 - Designating January 2026 as “School Director Recognition Month”

Sponsor

Rep. Joe Ciresi (D)

Summary

Resolution designating the month of January 2026 as “School Director Recognition Month” in Pennsylvania.

Intro Date

01/13/2026

Last Action

01/13/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

HCO3002 - Pennsylvania Investment in Student Achievement Act (PISA Act)

Sponsor

Rep. Barbara Gleim (R)

Summary

Provides student-centered school funding rather than providing funding by school districts.

Intro Date

01/13/2026

Last Action

01/13/2026 H - Cosponsor memo filed

SCO1464 - Improving Oversight and Reporting of Publicly Funded Child Care**Sponsor**

Sen. Michele Brooks (R)

Summary

Increases transparency, oversight and reporting of taxpayer-funded child care programs in Pennsylvania.

Intro Date

01/09/2026

Last Action

01/09/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

SCO1468 - January 2026 as "School Directors Recognition Month"**Sponsor**

Sen. Carolyn T. Comitta (D)

Summary

Resolution designating January 2026 as "School Director Recognition Month" in Pennsylvania.

Intro Date

01/12/2026

Last Action

01/12/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

SCO1480 - National Guard Spouse Education Loan Repayment Act**Sponsor**

Sen. Doug Mastriano (R)

Summary

Aims to support Pennsylvania's National Guard families by allowing a Guard member's state education benefits to be applied toward repayment of a spouse's existing student loans.

Intro Date

01/13/2026

Last Action

01/13/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

SCO1483 - Authority for School Administrators in Pittsburgh Public Schools to Organize

Sponsor

Sen. Lindsey Marie Williams (D)

Summary

Aims to add Pittsburgh Public Schools to the list of school districts whose administrators are authorized to organize under the Administrative Code.

Intro Date

01/14/2026

Last Action

01/14/2026 S - Cosponsor memo filed

Basic Ed Bill Actions

No Basic Ed Bill Actions this week.

Higher Ed Bill Actions

No Bill Actions this week.

Upcoming Events

TUESDAY – 01/27/2026

9:30 AM, [House Education](#)

Informational Meeting, Room 140, Main Capitol

Informational meeting to discuss and hear testimony from stakeholders and experts on the Future Ready PA Index and Student Outcomes.

10:00 AM, [House Health](#)

Voting Meeting, Room 205, Ryan Office Building

To consider: [HB 2042](#) and [HR 203](#)

MONDAY – 02/23/2026

9:30 AM, [Senate Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, Hearing Room 1, North Office Building

Budget Hearing with the Department of Education (PDE).

1:00 PM, [Senate Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, Hearing Room 1, North Office Building
Budget hearing with the Department of Education (PDE).

TUESDAY – 03/03/2026

9:30 AM, [Senate Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, Hearing Room 1, North Office Building
Budget hearing with state universities in Millersville, East Stroudsburg, West Chester and Indiana.

1:00 PM, [House Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, House Chamber
Budget hearing with the Department of Education (PDE).

WEDNESDAY – 03/11/2026

10:00 AM, [House Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, House Chamber
Budget hearing with the state-related universities.

1:00 PM, [House Appropriations](#)

Budget Hearing, House Chamber
Budget hearing with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and community colleges.

In the News

[01/12/2026 - Shapiro Administration Awards \\$600,345 in PA Farm Bill Grants to Expand Career Opportunities for Young Pennsylvanians in Agriculture](#)

[01/12/2026 - Educators Identify Opportunities to Improve Reading Performance](#)

[01/13/2026 - Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to Participate in National Reading Month with Classroom Visits](#)

[01/13/2026 - Bartolotta Announces 2026 Pennsylvania Ag & Youth Grant Awards in Washington County](#)

[01/14/2026 - Fritz Bill to Increase Locally Produced Agriculture for Schools Heads to Senate for Consideration](#)

[01/14/2026 - Cutler, Education Committee Members Ask Governor to Opt Pennsylvania into New Federal Tax Credit Program](#)

[01/15/2026 - Universal school meals: Most direct path to stronger schools](#)

[01/15/2026 - Brooks Applauds Federal Action Supporting Whole Milk in Schools](#)

[01/15/2026 - PSEA vice president testifies in support of funding school lunch for all students](#)

Education Recap is a comprehensive weekly report on legislative and executive actions on education related legislation in the Pennsylvania Capitol and is compiled and edited by PLS.

For subscription information, questions or more information contact PLS at mypls@mypls.com or 717-236-6984. Thank you, Deborah, Cheryl, Derek, Hattie, Sam, Grace, Aaron, Christian, Katie, Zoe, Daniel, Kyle, Nicholas, Dominic, Julia and Noah.

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