

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

FISCAL NOTE

BILL NO. House Bill 1505

PRINTER NO. 3764

AMOUNT

\$937,358,000
\$189,700,000

FUND

General Fund
School Safety and Security Fund

DATE INTRODUCED

May 28, 2025

PRIME SPONSOR

Representative Hanbidge

DESCRIPTION

House Bill 1505 amends the Public School Code as follows:

Standardized Testing Study

The legislation directs the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to submit a report by June 9, 2027, on the use of standardized tests in Pennsylvania, higher education assessments, and federal accountability requirements.

Lead Testing Threshold

The legislation changes the requirement for schools to provide alternate water sources if lead testing levels are in excess of .005 mg/L rather than the "maximum contaminant level goal" of 0.00 mg/L.

Public School Facility Inventory

The legislation requires the Department of Education to collect school facility information from each school district, intermediate unit, area career and technical center, cyber charter, and charter school no later than December 31, 2027, and every five years thereafter.

Permit for Classroom Monitors

The legislation limits the time a classroom monitor may serve in a single assignment to 20 cumulative days, clarifies that classroom monitors may only deliver assignments that have been created by a professional employee assigned to the classroom, and extends the ability for school entities to request classroom monitor permits from June 30, 2026, to June 30, 2029. It also changes the deadline for the annual Educator Preparation and Certification Report to the House and Senate Education Committees from March 1 to December 1.

Professional Education for School or System Leaders

The legislation clarifies that the terms "professional educator" and "school or system leader" include a director or assistant director of an area career and technical school and an individual serving as a superintendent or assistant superintendent on a commission qualification letter. It also clarifies that individuals serving as a superintendent or assistant superintendent on a commission qualification letter must meet continuing professional education requirements.

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Attendance Policy at Charter, Regional Charter, and Cyber Charter Schools

The legislation clarifies that a student may only receive an absence as a consequence for failure to complete a weekly benchmark.

School District Wellness Checks

The legislation requires a school district cyber school to conduct student wellness checks in the same manner as cyber charter school student wellness checks.

Truancy Procedures

The legislation requires a school to include in its notice to the parent or guardian of a habitually truant student, a form notice developed by the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts with the Department of Education detailing their right to petition the court for an educational best interest hearing by the magisterial district judge. It requires an educational best interest hearing be held within 10 days and in-person, unless the judge determines electronic communication is a necessary and appropriate alternative and include the school, the parent or guardian, and the student if they are age 15 or older. It requires the educational best interest hearing to consider the health and well-being of the child, attendance, grades, school enrollment history, safety concerns, academic access to programs, disciplinary actions, family support, and any other relevant factors. It prohibits a cyber charter school from enrolling a student who is habitually truant during the current school year unless a judge determines the transfer is in the educational best interest of the child.

Out-of-State Continuing Professional Development

The legislation permits an employed educator certified in another state to satisfy requirements for continuing professional education using credits or hours approved in another state and provides discretion for the Department of Education to reject credits that do not meet quality standards. It requires the department to notify a certified educator of their ability to maintain active certification if the educator discloses they are moving to another state.

Cyberbullying Policy

The legislation requires each school entity to adopt a policy or amend an existing policy relating to cyberbullying including disciplinary consequences and a procedure for investigating a report of bullying or cyber bullying and immediately notifying the parents or legal guardians of any student involved in the incident. It requires the policy to be posted online and be reviewed every three years and requires a school safety and security coordinator to add cyber bullying awareness and prevention to existing resources for students and training for staff. It requires the school safety and security committee to develop training criteria for school safety and security coordinators and minimum standards for training school employees on cyberbullying awareness and prevention. It also requires chief school administrators to include in their annual report the total number of bullying and cyberbullying incidents including those suspected to involve artificial intelligence-generated media and criminal offenses including sexual abuse of children, unlawful dissemination of intimate

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images, and digital forgery in addition to those already required to be reported by law.

School Safety and Security Fund

The legislation authorizes the use of \$8.3 million of unexpended, uncommitted, or unencumbered money from the School Safety and Security Fund for training purposes.

School Safety and Mental Health Grants

The legislation allocates \$100 million and 75% of any remaining money in the School Safety and Security Fund that is unexpended, uncommitted, or unencumbered from prior years (est. \$40.7 million) for school safety and mental health grants for school entities, and an additional \$20.7 million for targeted school safety grants. It distributes School Safety and Mental Health Grants by providing \$100,000 to each school district and \$70,000 to each area career and technical school, intermediate unit, charter school, regional charter school, and cyber charter school and provides for any remaining monies to be distributed to school districts on a pro rata basis according to their adjusted average daily membership.

School Mapping Services

The legislation establishes criteria for school mapping and contracts for school mapping services paid for in whole or in part using Commonwealth funds. It requires maps to be shared for free with law enforcement and to be compatible with their software systems, verified for accuracy, include appropriate labeling, and be maintained securely and confidentially in the United States.

School Health Services

The legislation allows school nurses and other trained health care practitioners to collect a student's height and weight information for growth pattern tracking, calculation of body mass index, and reporting. It prohibits a school from sharing the body mass index with the student or their parent or legal guardian unless requested in writing and the calculation of body mass index in academic instruction. It allows a parent or legal guardian to request in writing that their student be exempt from height and weight measurement at school.

Eating Disorder Awareness and Education

The legislation requires school entities to provide information on their website regarding eating disorder awareness for students in grades six through twelve. It requires the Joint State Government Commission to develop the Eating Disorder Advisory Committee to meet twice in the first year and every three years thereafter to make recommendations regarding eating disorder awareness and education. It requires the Departments of Health and Education to develop and update eating disorder awareness information and materials every five years using the recommendations of the committee.

Use of Funds for Implementing Later School Start Times

The legislation allows a school district to use subsidies received for basic education funding, pupil transportation, special education, and school employees social

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security, along with any available fund balance, to offset costs relating to adopting planning, implementing, or operating a later start time. It requires the school district post the proposal online and solicit public comments at two advertised public meetings prior to adoption of the later start time. It also requires a school district that adopts a later start time to report to the Department of Education the new start time and an accounting of the funds used for implementation.

Flexible Instruction Days

The legislation requires the Department of Education to collect information from school entities on the number of flexible instruction days used in the prior year, along with any other remote or virtual learning days whether used by an entire building, full or half day, the reason for the day, and the legal authority for using them and to issue an annual report to the General Assembly. It also requires a school entity to discuss any flexible instruction days and remote or virtual instruction days at a public meeting before approving their academic calendar.

Recess

The legislation requires at least 30 minutes of recess, in addition to lunch time, for full-day kindergarten through 5th grade students and 15 minutes of recess for half-day kindergarten students. It requires recess to be offered outside when possible and without the use of electronic devices.

Economic Education/Personal Financial Literacy Programs

The legislation allows advanced coursework, such as AP, IB, and Cambridge courses, to satisfy the requirement for students to complete a course in financial literacy. It also repeals the task force on economic education and personal financial literacy education.

Social Media Literacy Education

The legislation requires standards adopted by the State Board of Education (board) to include social media safety and the impacts of social media and mobile device usage. It requires the board to revise the standards and include the recommendations of the Joint State Government Commission's Task Force on Child Protection in the Digital Age. It also directs the Department of Education to provide social media literacy materials to public and nonpublic schools and offer social media literacy for continuing professional education.

Pre-K Counts

The legislation allows intermediate units to serve as eligible providers under the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program. It requires Pre-K Counts programs to provide 180 days or 900 hours of instruction for full-day or 450 hours for a half-day program.

Duquesne City SD Consolidation

The legislation requires the Department of Education's project team tasked with assessing the consolidation of Duquesne City School District with two or more local school districts to submit its report no later than March 31, 2027, and to include a plan for consolidation, an evaluation of safety and security issues, building and facility

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requirements, governance issues, financial impacts, and necessary enhancements to educational program offerings.

Disability Inclusive Curriculum Pilot Program

The legislation extends the Disability Inclusive Curriculum Pilot Program for two additional years.

Cyber Charter School Requirements and Prohibitions-Wellness Checks

The legislation amends the wellness check requirement to be either in person or via electronic means including turning on the webcam to visually see and communicate with the student during synchronous online instruction or participate in virtual or face to face health screenings, standardized testing, and other school sponsored activities. It provides that if a student misses a wellness check the school must make an ongoing effort to complete the check. After three days, the school shall schedule a wellness review conference. It provides that if the student or parents do not participate in the wellness conference, the cyber charter school shall conduct an in-person wellness check within 24 hours. It requires schools to submit by March 1 their wellness policy to the Department of Education for approval and, once approved, to post it on its website.

Cyber Charter Enrollment and Notification

The legislation reduces the proof of residency requirement to once a year, where parents must provide proof of residency to a cyber charter school by September 15th each year. It requires the cyber school to submit residency forms to the school district by September 30th. It provides alternate notification to the school district by the cyber charter school if a parent fails to submit the proof of residence form. It provides a process for the Department of Education to determine residency when there is a dispute between a cyber charter school and the resident school district.

Career and Technical Education Temporary Waiver

The legislation allows the Secretary of Education to waive the requirement that career and technical education programs conclude in 12th grade.

Community College Funding

The legislation provides for the distribution of \$277.3 million to community colleges in Fiscal Year 2026-27 and provides that each community college will receive the same amount of funding as in the prior fiscal year (2025-26).

Thaddeus Stevens College Bachelor of Applied Science Degrees

The legislation allows the board of trustees at Thaddeus Stevens College to establish and offer a bachelor of applied science degree in fields aligned with technical education, workforce development, and high-priority occupations subject to accreditor approval. It requires the college to collaborate with other institutions of higher education to avoid unnecessary duplication of programs, promote transfer and articulation pathways, and address workforce needs. It also requires the board of trustees of the college to submit an annual report summarizing the baccalaureate programs offered, enrollment, completion, and employment outcomes and alignment with workforce demand.

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Grow PA Tuition Waiver and Grow PA Scholarship Grant Programs

The legislation expands eligible trade programs to include programs offered at an institution of higher education that is the same classification of instructional program offered at Penn College of Technology or Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology. The legislation allows students that are enrolled in accelerated master's degree programs to participate in the Grow PA Tuition Waiver Program and Grow PA Scholarship Program.

The legislation establishes an appeals process for a student, with the approval of their institution of higher education, to petition the Pennsylvania Higher Assistance Agency (PHEAA) to determine that the student's course of study will result in employment in an in-demand occupation. It provides that the appeal may include, but not be limited to, a student enrolled in a general program of study or a pre-major. It also provides for PHEAA to report the number of appeals granted and denied and a list of programs of study granted and denied in their annual report.

The legislation requires PHEAA to send a complete list of all approved occupations to each institution of higher education no later than November 30th of each year and for PHEAA to review and certify the list of approved courses of study for each institution of higher education prior to an application period being opened.

The legislation requires each institution of higher education to participate in the Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program, certify an applicant's eligibility within 30 calendar days of receiving the request, identify and report by January 15th of each year the courses of study offered at the institution that are eligible for the Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program, and post information about the Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program and Waiver Program on their website along with all approved courses of study offered at the institution of higher education.

Extraordinary Special Education Program Expenses

The legislation provides for \$5 million from the Special Education Funding appropriation to be distributed to charter schools in a school district of the first class for expenses incurred in providing a special education program or service to students with disabilities as approved by the Secretary of Education in Fiscal Year 2026-27 and each fiscal year thereafter.

Ready to Succeed Scholarship Program

The legislation increases the annual household income limit from \$200,000 to \$208,000 for the Ready-To-Succeed scholarship and requires the maximum scholarship award not be less than \$3,000 after July 1, 2026. The current maximum scholarship amount is \$2,500.

State Aid for Libraries

The legislation distributes \$75.5 million in aid to public libraries. The distribution will provide each library with the same allocation as in Fiscal Year 2025-26.

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Basic Education Funding Adjustments

The legislation provides \$8 million in supplemental Basic Education Funding payments to school districts that meet certain requirements. The school districts are as follows: Morrisville Borough SD (\$3.5 million); Muhlenberg SD (\$2.5 million), Whitehall-Coplay SD (\$1 million), and Steelton-Highspire SD (\$1 million).

Temporary Assistance Fund

The legislation allows the Department of Education during the 2026-27 fiscal year to use unexpended funds from the Tuition for Orphans and Children Placed in Private Homes appropriation for a program to assist residential private academic schools who apply for assistance with tuition costs for court placed students for which the school district of residence was unable to be determined. It requires the department to develop an application and the school to provide documented proof of attempts to identify the students' school district of residence. This provision is estimated to cost \$500,000.

Use of Undistributed Funds

The legislation allows the Department of Education to use up to \$7 million in undistributed funds in Fiscal Year 2026-27 to assist school districts in financial distress or identified for financial watch status.

Ready-to-Learn Block Grant

Provides for the distribution of \$565 million through the Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTLBG). This RTLBG includes: (1) an adequacy supplement for school districts of \$526.4million; (2) a tax equity supplement for school districts of \$32.2 million; and (3) a minimum guarantee of \$6.4 million to ensure that no school district receives less than \$50,000 when considering the distribution of funds from the adequacy supplement and tax equity supplements. In addition, it provides for a limitation on the use of Act 1 exceptions for school districts receiving the adequacy supplement or tax equity supplement for the 2027-2028 school year.

School Construction and Maintenance Programs

The legislation extends the PLANCON moratorium prohibiting the Department of Education from approving new school building construction or reconstruction applications until the first fiscal year in which money is specifically appropriated for this purpose.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The enactment of House Bill 1505 will cost the Commonwealth \$1,127,058,000 in fiscal year 2026-2027. This amount includes: \$937,358,000 from the General Fund and \$189,700,000 from the School Safety and Security Fund.

General Fund

The legislation allocates \$565,000,000 to school districts through the Ready to Learn Block Grant's Adequacy Supplement, Tax Equity Supplement, and minimum increase. Total Ready-to-Learn Block Grant funding for school districts and charter schools in the 2026-27 fiscal year will be \$1,948,481,000, including a \$1,383,481,000

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Foundation Supplement authorized under existing law. This reflects a 40.8% increase over the prior fiscal year (2025–26).

The legislation distributes \$277,338,000 to community colleges, \$75,470,000 to public libraries, \$8,000,000 in Basic Education Funding for adjustments to four school districts, and \$5,000,000 in Special Education Funding for extraordinary special education costs to charter schools located in the school district of the first class.

The legislation permits the Department of Education to use \$7,000,000 in unexpended funds to provide assistance to school districts in financial distress or financial watch status.

The legislation authorizes the department to use unexpended funds from the appropriation for Tuition for Orphans and Children Placed in Private Homes to assist residential private academic schools with tuition costs for court or agency-placed students whose school district of residence could not be identified in Fiscal Year 2026–27. The estimated cost of this provision is \$500,000.

According to the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC), it can complete the standardized testing study required in the legislation within its current operating budget. For reference, the average cost for the LBFC to complete a report or study is \$258,900.

Increasing the income threshold from \$200,000 to \$208,000 and the maximum grant award from \$2,500 to \$3,000 under the Ready-to-Succeed Program can be accomplished with funds already available to the program.

School Safety and Security Fund

The legislation authorizes the expenditure of \$189,700,000 from the School Safety and Security Fund, including \$8,300,000 for training at the discretion of the School Safety and Security Committee, \$160,700,000 for School Safety and Mental Health Grants, and \$20,700,000 for Targeted School Safety Grants.

The provisions in the legislation that do not carry a specified fiscal impact either incur no cost or can be implemented within existing agency operating budgets, as they fall within routine functions and established areas of expertise.