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Gov. Wolf Visits Norristown Area School District to Highlight Resources Supporting a Safe Return to School

Norristown, PA – Governor Tom Wolf visited Hancock Elementary School in the Norristown Area School District today to visit with students and teachers and outlined four steps the state is taking to protect students, reduce the need for disruptive quarantines and keep students in the classrooms: masking, testing, vaccination and increased funding.

“Back to school is an exciting time as many of our teachers and students return to the classroom fulltime,” said Gov. Wolf. “Our goal this year is not just to start the year with kids in school, but to keep them in school all year long. Research shows that learning in a classroom is important, because many students learn better in a classroom.

“But being in school is just as important for the social, emotional and physical well-being of young students. Our kids want to see their friends again, they want to play sports and participate in the activities that help them build skills and connect to their peers. That’s why we want to keep kids in school this year.”

The governor was joined by state Education Secretary Noe Ortega, National Education Association (NEA) President Becky Pringle, Pennsylvania Education Association (PSEA) President Rich Askey, Norristown Area School District (NASD) Superintendent Chris Dormer and teacher Lee Speers.

With the goal of keeping kids in the classroom and COVID-19 out, the governor described four key resources help schools and protect communities:

- [Requiring masks to be worn inside K-12 school buildings, early learning programs and child care providers](#) starting Sept. 7 through an Order signed by acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam. The order reduces the risk that entire classrooms will need to quarantine, which means fewer disruptions to students. The order was [praised by medical and education experts across the state](#). A series of [answers to frequently asked questions about the order](#) is online.

- [Requiring vaccine providers to coordinate vaccine clinics with schools and institutions of higher education](#) through an order by the acting Secretary of Health. Vaccine providers are expected to make every effort to coordinate a vaccine clinic for the employees, contractors, volunteers, students or students' families of the school, at the request of schools.
- [Free, weekly COVID-19 testing for participating K-12 schools](#) through a partnership with Ginkgo. The pooled testing initiative will help to identify and prevent the spread of COVID-19 throughout the schools.
- [\\$4.9 billion in one-time funding for safe schools through the federal American Rescue Plan](#), which school districts can use to support the long-term work of education recovery and provide safe environments for students and school staff.

"As students and educators return to schools for the new school year, we are focused on keeping students safe, learning and engaged," said NEA President and Pennsylvania middle school science teacher Becky Pringle. "NEA has said from the beginning of this pandemic that everyone needs to follow the science, and evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines, combined with masking and other mitigation strategies, are the most powerful weapon we have against the pandemic. That is why I look forward to joining Gov. Tom Wolf and applaud him for putting students and educators' health first and keeping Pennsylvania schools safe."

"We know that in-person learning is the best learning environment for our students to be in,' said PSEA President Rich Askey. "It's also where PSEA members want to be more than anywhere else — in the classroom, five days a week, teaching their students. That's why PSEA has been such a strong voice for masking up and other CDC-recommended safety measures. And we want to thank Gov. Wolf and his administration for their commitment to creating safe spaces for learning in our schools. Being smart about safety is how we ensure that we can start this school year in person, continue in person, and finish in person."

"The new school year has begun, and we must do everything possible to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools so they can remain open for in-person teaching, learning, and growing this year," said Secretary of Education Dr. Noe Ortega. "I'm proud of Pennsylvania's school communities for working together and continuing to prioritize health and safety to keep students and educators where we know it's so important for them to be – in their classrooms."

"Norristown Area School District is proud to host Governor Wolf as we open the 2021-2022 school year," said Superintendent Christopher Dormer. "After an unprecedented school year with only being able to offer virtual and hybrid learning, NASD is proud to offer full, in-person instruction five days per week while continuing to keep health and safety a priority and commitment for all students, staff, families, and community. We are appreciative of the governor's actions to protect all Pennsylvanians and ensure school districts are equipped to successfully navigate the COVID-19 pandemic."

In addition to a layered approach to protecting schools from the pandemic, the Wolf administration is investing in a quality education to prepare young people for a successful future. Norristown Area School District was among the 100 school districts included in the groundbreaking Level Up initiative created with this year's state budget. Level Up provides an additional \$100 million to the 100 lowest wealth school districts, with Norristown Area receiving nearly \$1 million, which will be rolled into its base funding going forward.

With a \$416 million increase in education, this year's budget makes the largest state funding increase in education in Pennsylvania history. Gov. Wolf has fought to increase investments in schools in each of the seven state budgets during his term, and funding in this budget is \$1.8 billion more than when he took office.

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