



## State asks feds to reconsider their Highly Qualified findings

[www.psea.org](http://www.psea.org)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has responded to a finding by the U.S. Department of Education that questions the “vigor” of the state’s plans.

In November 2005, USDOE visited PDE to monitor Pennsylvania’s compliance with NCLB requirements. Rumors have circulated for several weeks about concerns expressed by USDOE with the way Pennsylvania has addressed the highly qualified issue and the Bridge programs.

Rather than participate in the rumor mill, the PSEA Executive Director, General Counsel, officers and staff have worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to help PDE in addressing USDOE’s concerns.

On Thursday, February 23, PDE submitted its preliminary response to USDOE’s concerns, and sent copies of its response to federal legislators. PDE asked USDOE to reconsider several of its findings regarding PA’s implementation of the NLCB including the findings regarding Highly Qualified status and the Bridge programs.

PSEA agrees with the PDE’s response to USDOE and is

working with our Congressional representatives to encourage the DOE’s acceptance of the Pennsylvania processes.

The following is a brief summary of the findings and PDE’s responses:

### ***Elementary teachers certified prior to 1988***

USDOE rejected Pennsylvania’s determination that elementary school teachers certified prior to 1988 (e.g., who were not required to pass the PRAXIS II test) are Highly Qualified.

PDE disagrees, asserting that those teachers have demonstrated subject matter competency as they have completed approved teacher preparation programs, converted their temporary certificates to Level II certificates, undergone regular performance assessments, and participated in rigorous professional development requirements.

### ***Social studies teachers***

USDOE found that middle and secondary school teachers of history, geography, civics/ government or economics have not demonstrated subject matter competency in each of those

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## Upcoming Events

— March 15 —

### **CCIU Board of Directors Meeting**

8 PM - ESC  
Downingtown, PA

— March 17-19 —

### **PSEA Minority Leadership Conference**

Harrisburg, PA

— April 7 —

### **Advisory/Rep Council**

3 PM - ESC  
Downingtown, PA

— April 19 —

### **SER Coordinated Bargaining**

4:30 PM

### **SER PACE Committee**

5:15 PM

### **SER Executive Committee Meeting**

7:00 PM

To submit information or an article for publication in *The Open Door*, send an e-mail to the editor at [alberttucker@verizon.net](mailto:alberttucker@verizon.net) or send via courier to Al Tucker at CAT Pickering

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subjects, even if they have passed the PRAXIS II Social Studies Exam, and thus are not highly qualified.

PDE disagrees and asserts that Pennsylvania's approved social studies teachers' preparation programs are comprehensive and require mastery of each content area; and further that PRAXIS II exam is an interdisciplinary approach to social studies content areas, is aligned with PDE standards for social studies, and adequately covers all of the key areas.

### **Bridge I**

USDOE found that entry to the state's Bridge I program was not rigorous enough and that teachers should not be considered highly qualified until they complete the Bridge I requirements.

PDE disagrees, asserting that the Bridge I program fits into an already rigorous certification program; that teachers on the Bridge must continue to satisfy ongoing professional development requirements and undergo annual performance assessment, and that the highly qualified status for teachers entering Bridge I is "contingent" upon the completion of the Bridge I program.

### **Bridge II**

USDOE finds that the Bridge II program for acquiring a "Highly Qualified" designation is not sufficiently rigorous.

PDE does not contest this finding. PDE notes that Bridge II was only available to special education, ESL and alternative education teachers who taught multiple subjects and that, to date, no teacher has utilized the Bridge II program.

PDE indicates that it will work with stakeholders from the educational community to create a new process for those educators.

## **The Enrollment Deadline for Flexible Spending Account is June 1st, 2006!**

If you have questions about enrollment in this plan please contact our Kades Margolis Representative

John McCauley • 610-971-1080

1-800-433-1826 Ext 126

e-mail: [jmccauley@4kmc.com](mailto:jmccauley@4kmc.com)

For information about current accounts in the Security Flex 125 Program the web site is [www.securityflex.com](http://www.securityflex.com)

Instructions say to click on the "Security Flex 125 Program" icon.

There is also a 24-hour interactive voice response system at 1-888-473-5572. Personalized telephone support hours are Monday - Friday 7:00 am - 5:00pm central time 1-888-662-3646.

## **What Is a Flexible Spending Account?**

A Flexible Spending Account (FSA), also called a flex plan or reimbursement account, is an employer-sponsored benefit that allows you to pay for eligible medical expenses on a pre-tax basis (there are also similar accounts for dependent and child-care expenses).

If you expect to incur medical expenses that won't be reimbursed by your regular health insurance plan, you should be taking advantage of your employer's FSA if one is offered.

### **What Expenses Are Eligible for Reimbursement?**

Any expense that is considered a deductible medical expense by the Internal Revenue Service and is not reimbursed through your insurance can be reimbursed through the Flexible Spending Account. Examples could include:

- \* Fees paid to doctors, dentists, surgeons, chiropractors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and Christian Science practitioners Contact lenses and eyeglasses
- \* Fees for hospital services, qualified long-term care services, accident and health, and qualified long-term care insurance premiums, nursing services, laboratory fees, prescription medicines and drugs, and insulin.
- \* Acupuncture treatments
- \* Inpatient treatment at a center for alcohol or drug addiction
- \* Smoking-cessation programs and prescribed drugs to help nicotine withdrawal
- \* False teeth, hearing aids, crutches, wheel-chairs, and guide dogs for the blind or deaf
- \* Fees in excess of reasonable and customary amounts allowed by your insurance
- \* Cost of vasectomies, hysterectomies and birth control
- \* Non-elective cosmetic surgery
- \* Co-payments on covered expenses
- \* Deductibles
- \* Braces
- \* Prescription drugs or prescription co-pays

## Rendell budget proposes new funding formula for public schools

www.psea.org

Gov. Ed Rendell on Feb. 8 unveiled his \$25.4 billion state budget proposal for 2006-07, promising more money to revamp schools and put laptop computers in every high school classroom.

Most new dollars in the governor's budget target education funding. Rendell proposed an additional \$517 million for public schools, a 6.4 percent increase.

Rendell proposed \$20 million toward a goal of placing laptops capable of accessing the Internet on every public high school student's desk. He would spend \$3.7 million to expand scholarships for students seeking college degrees in computer science, math or science and who agree to work in the state after graduation.

"What I have proposed today is bold and far-reaching," Rendell said. "It is necessary and vital for our future. And the good news is that it is totally affordable."

A new state funding formula for public schools would give more money to poorer school districts, those with fast-growing enrollments and those that have many children who aren't fluent in English. A little more than half of the increased funding would go toward new programs and the rest to improve basic education by helping districts reach spending levels of at least \$9,030 per pupil.

"That's the amount you want to bring all the schools to for an

adequate education," Education Secretary Gerald Zahorchak told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

"This [would provide] the most state resources to the communities with the greatest need and the least local wealth, and it's helping school districts reach a funding level that provides a high-quality education," Zahorchak said.

The governor also offered \$75.5 million in aid to the state's public libraries, a \$14 million increase.

One of Rendell's biggest other budget initiatives is his plan to offer health care coverage to an additional 15,000 children in 2006-07, would cost \$4.4 million in state money. The governor proposed it as part of a five-year plan to make health care coverage available to all the state's children. "The failure to provide health insurance for every child forces parents to make impossible choices," Rendell said.

PSEA President James R. Weaver said the basic education subsidy increase is the largest in 16 years and will help "teachers and school employees significantly."

"I am hard-pressed to remember the last time a governor led with a proposal that made more important and strategic investments in improving the lives of children," said Joan Benso, executive director of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

## Bush Proposed Budget Cuts: Education the Key Victim

by Albert Tucker

Forty-eight education programs would be cut totaling \$4.3 billion, including \$2.2 billion for high school programs, including state grants for vocational education. Perkins funding would be eliminated if the controversial budget is adopted by congress.

The proposed budget would also cut \$440 million in Safe and Drug-Free School grants, \$500 million in education technology state grants, \$225 million for the Even Start literacy program, \$280 million for Upward Bound programs for inner-city youths and a \$150 million talent research program, according to the budget requested by the Bush administration.

These cuts would underfund No Child Left Behind by 15 billion dollars and cause those who can least afford expensive health care (elderly, low-income working families and children along with the disabled) to lose 36 billion in Medicare and Medicaid benefits over the next five years.

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*The current cost of bringing democracy to Iraq has reached over 246 billion dollars thus far, and when coupled with tax cuts for the wealthy, have taken the U.S. economy from a surplus when George Bush took office to staggering deficits.*

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If you haven't already voiced your opinion to your representatives - in the words of a friend of mine, "this isn't a fire drill - this is a real fire!" Call, write, e-mail or fax our elected representatives to give voice for those we teach.

# Action Group Convening on Closing Achievement Gaps!

www.psea.org March 3, 2006

PSEA is convening an Action Group to examine evidence related to closing achievement gaps and recommend actions at the state, local and individual level. Efforts to close achievement gaps can have far-reaching impacts, both positive and negative, on the professional lives of teachers and support professionals. It is critical to develop strategies to close gaps that retain the rights of teachers and support professionals, both statewide and within collective bargaining agreements. This Action Group will help PSEA develop strategies, positions, and activities related to achievement gaps.

This experience will be intense and highly interactive. Members will examine research studies, hear from speakers who hold diverse perspectives on how to close gaps, and debate the role of PSEA in relation to this information. Specifically, the Action Group will grapple with questions such as the following:

- What are the achievement gaps, and what causes them?
- Who is responsible for closing the gaps?
- Where do teachers and support professionals fit in?
- What “proven practices” exist to close gaps in schools? How widespread are these practices, and how do they impact teachers?
- How practical are the “proven practices” for every school?
- What is the role of PSEA members, individually and collectively, to help close gaps?

When and Where. July 24-27, 2006, at Gettysburg College. For more information about joining this action group download this pdf file of the application and more detailed description.



## You Can Find Us on the Web!

Our website, <http://www.cciuea.org> has recently been revamped to include a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) area, easier navigation, the ability to download a pdf of this publication, and an expanded links area.

If you would like to share content that fellow members could use — an uplifting story, a useful web address or whatever, please e-mail it to the webmaster at [alberttucker@verizon.net](mailto:alberttucker@verizon.net)

Please give us feedback on what would be useful or help to strengthen this communications tool.

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### *The Open Door*

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