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Media Advisory

What: Yinzer Nation to Rally Protesting Education Cuts

Rally with parents, students, teachers, and concerned community members protesting the devastating cuts to public education budget in the state. Under the theme, ***“Some cuts don’t heal, keep education real”***, parents and children will be speaking about what they love about public education in Pittsburgh and how cuts from Harrisburg are hurting their schools. Participants will be writing post cards to their state legislators and the governor asking them to reverse the cuts. Parents, students, community members, and local politicians from all over the region are being invited.

When: Saturday, February 11, 2012, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM (media should arrive by 10:45 AM).

Where: Schenley Plaza – tented area between the Oakland Carnegie Library and Hillman Library

Outraged by the \$1 BILLION state cuts to our schools, a group of Pittsburgh Public School parents formed a strategy group in late 2011 to work at the state level. That group has quickly grown into a region-wide movement as hundreds of people from across Southwest PA have joined the fight to stop this attack on public education. Schools throughout the region have been forced to cut teachers, tutoring programs for the most at-risk students, librarians, music programs, and textbooks and classroom supplies. Many districts in Southwest PA are being forced to raise local property taxes. We have already published numerous letters to the editor, held letter writing parties attended by hundreds to write letters to the Governor and key legislators, participated in multiple state-wide “call in” days to the same officials, and created connections to parents in other school districts, all of whom have been negatively affected. *Because of the outrage parents are feeling, these events have been growing, culminating in this rally, which is being planned by the people from over 20 schools in the region. This is the largest event of this group to date.*

"When I heard about the state's plan to cut one billion out of education last year I wasn't sure what the cuts were going to mean for my family. When I found out in January that my son, who goes to Linden Elementary in the East End, was going to lose two homeroom teachers, his science teacher and his band program, as well as sustain 50% cuts to his music, art and library programs I was devastated. I haven't stopped calling legislators, writing letters to Governor Corbett and urging people to come to this rally together since I heard the news." -Kathy M. Newman, a mother of a 2nd grader at Linden Elementary.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Education Voters Statement on Proposed Education Budget.

HARRISBURG, PA (February 7, 2012) – Today, the Governor outlined his funding priorities in his 2012-2013 budget speech. In this proposal, the Governor continues to reduce funding to public education. For basic education, Corbett carries forward last year's drastic \$900 million cut and then he proposes combining four separate line items into a single line. Unfortunately the total funding of what these four items would have added up to if they were not combined means basic education will receive an additional cut, a cut local school districts cannot handle. In addition, PASSHE schools will receive a 20% cut, state-related schools will receive a 30% cut and Pre-K Counts and Head Start will each get a 5% cut.

“There was one right thing to do for public education in this year's budget and that was to restore the funds that were cut from our students and our communities last year and it didn't happen. They said we were forced to make cuts last year because of tough times – if that were true, we would be getting back on track with both the funding formula and funding levels this year. The cuts to early education are disturbing and the cuts to higher education are shocking. This is ideological. I really have to question a Governor's priorities if he isn't willing to take care of children and provide an opportunity for them to learn, as well as think long term and help prepare our workforce for tomorrow, “ said Susan Gobreski, Executive Director of Education Voters of Pennsylvania.

Last year, the Governor proposed and passed a historic cut to education funding of about \$900 million dollars. Class size went up in almost every community, and important programs that affect student achievement were cut, like Kindergarten, early education, arts, science, and technology. Pennsylvania had been showing steady gains in academic achievement, and the districts that had been historically the most underfunded showed the greatest gains, demonstrating the impact of targeted increases and investments in programs that produce outcomes. Gobreski said, “That is the funny thing about education, it's really as simple as giving our students a quality opportunity – when we provide it, they learn.”

Legislators from both parties, as well as community, business and civic leaders, have been calling for the state budget to restore funding or, at minimum, stop cutting the support for education. Many legislators are scrambling to position themselves as a friend of public education, given the trend. With state cuts being so drastic, many communities have been forced to cut programs, increase class sizes or raise local taxes, the worst way to fund education. For the last couple of decades, communities have had to take care of what the state has sloughed off, which is a neat political trick for state elected officials, but communities are tired of having their local economies being played.

The Governor's political spin has been that this is the fault of the temporary stimulus money, but in reality, the stimulus money was supposed to be used to help prevent harmful state cuts during the worst of the downturn– they paid our bills and: “After that money was gone, the Commonwealth was supposed to resume their role in properly funding the state basic education formula.” Gobreski said, “The political tricks and fuzzy math abound: they reduce overall spending, combined several line items into one and called it an increase, knowing that the average person isn't going to read the line by line version of the budget. It would be like doing this to your kids; last week your allowance was \$10, plus I gave you \$8 for lunch money and then \$2 for your scout dues. But from now on, instead, I am going to give you \$15 in allowance (total) as your money for the week. There, I increased your allowance. Aren't you happy?”

Education Voters is a non-partisan non-profit advocacy organization that works with parents and community leaders throughout the Commonwealth, engaging voters in advocating for strong public education policy.