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Commentary for the January 31, 2017 Circuit Rider Press Conference

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My name is Mark Hoffman. I proudly serve as the Executive Director of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit. The Bucks IU is one of 29 Intermediate Units serving the students, educators, families, schools, and school districts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Formed in the early 1970s, Pennsylvania's Intermediate Units have consistently innovated and evolved throughout their history to provide their local communities with a wide spectrum of school support services.

In its role as Bucks County's educational service agency, the Bucks IU has the privilege of partnering with our county's thirteen public school districts, three career and technical centers, and countless non-public and private schools to provide high-quality, cost-effective regional educational services. The Bucks IU is also proud to serve more than 3,000 children each year ages 3 through 5 with special needs as Bucks County's provider of early intervention services. In addition, the Bucks IU was recently awarded federal Head Start and Early Head Start grant funding to provide more than 400 economically eligible students across the county with no-cost, high-quality pre-school programming.

Through its position at the county level, the Bucks IU has the opportunity to work with the county's school districts to leverage our collective economies of scale to improve operational efficiencies and save money. My purpose in speaking this morning is to share a few examples of the ways Bucks County's public schools are working together every day to reduce expenses and improve service to our students and families.

Health Care

In response to rising health care costs, the Bucks IU, along with the Pennsylvania State Education Association, are founding members of the Bucks and Montgomery County Schools Health Care Consortium. The consortium, currently comprised of 22 school districts from both Bucks and Montgomery Counties, represents more than 11,000 school district employees and 29,000 covered lives. The consortium is a joint labor/management trust and, as a large group purchaser of medical, dental, vision, and prescription drug benefits, is able to provide

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significant cost savings for its member school districts. The consortium has collectively saved more than \$30 million for its member school districts since its inception in 2012. Projected savings of an additional \$21.5 million are expected over the next three years due to a change in prescription and medical benefit providers, a more aggressive wellness program for members, and efforts to begin to develop one hundred percent pooling of all rates across all school districts.

Cooperative Purchasing

Each of the county's thirteen school districts and three career and technical centers is a voting member of the Bucks County Schools Cooperative Purchasing Group. This consortium is managed by the Bucks IU on behalf of the participating districts to engage in the joint purchasing of school materials, supplies, equipment, and services, in accordance with the applicable provisions of Public School Code. For the 2016-2017 school year, Bucks County's school districts and career and technical centers leverage the collective purchasing power of this combined consortium to purchase a wide variety of products and services at reduced, discounted rates. Examples include discounted disposable cafeteria products; custodial supplies; groceries; heating fuel; mulch, wood chips and soil; tires, nursing supplies; copy paper; and vehicle fuel.

In the area of technology support, the Bucks IU has collaborated with Microsoft to offer discounted pricing for software. This program alone has saved Bucks County districts an estimated \$400,000 annually.

The Bucks IU has also developed partnerships with many organizations that offer curriculum solutions. Through these consortia, districts are able to realize cost savings in a variety of formats, from paying several dollars less per student for licenses, to receiving several percentage reductions off of the total cost of services. Examples include significant pricing discounts for data analytics and assessment systems, benchmark testing solutions, digital video, and online learning management systems.

Special Education

Since its inception, the Bucks IU has partnered with Bucks County's public school districts to provide a continuum of special education support for students from birth through age 21. In many cases, the special education services provided by the Bucks IU on behalf of the public school districts are offered at a regional level. If more than one district can benefit from these services in a given geographic region, the Bucks IU may elect to operate a regional classroom in one of the local schools, where students from multiple districts may attend the classes at this location. This method of offering regional special education services provides students and their families with the highest level of special education services that might not otherwise be possible on an individual school or district basis. This method of providing regional special education services has successfully served the school districts of Bucks County for several decades. The districts benefit from having a high-quality, cost-effective option to serve their students with special needs. And, most importantly, the students enrolled in these programs benefit by attending school in classrooms specially designed to meet their specific needs. The Bucks IU is honored to serve more than 650 students from districts throughout the county in more than 100 classrooms in this manner.

In the summer, more than 650 students are served by the Bucks IU's countywide Extended School Year program for students with special needs who receive specialized instruction in classrooms and throughout the community.

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The Bucks IU also offers highly trained therapeutic staff to school districts to serve students in a wide variety of specialized program areas like: speech language pathology, hearing support, vision support, behavior analysis, brain injury support, social work, school psychology, and occupational and physical therapy.

Regional Wide Area Network & Internet Connectivity

On behalf of the local school districts and career and technical centers, the Bucks IU operates a 10 Gbps Regional Wide Area Network for Internet and data connectivity. All 13 school districts and all 3 career and technical centers participate in this network, which provides them with a highly stable data network. As the world becomes more dependent upon digital solutions and the Internet, this network continues to evolve to meet the needs of our members to leverage our collective economy of scale to bring higher amounts of Internet access to the students of Bucks County at a greatly reduced price compared to what the expenses would be if the districts were to purchase independently. Additionally, this network provides a unique opportunity for private sharing of data and resources, including the capacity for off-site data backup and disaster recovery services.

Professional Development

Bucks County's school districts believe in providing their teaching and administrative staff with on-going, job-embedded professional development. Highly trained teachers and school leaders are essential pieces of a successful school system. As such, the Bucks IU coordinates many professional learning opportunities each year to support the development of teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators. Each year, several thousand educators are trained through our collective, countywide efforts at reduced costs. By working together through the Bucks IU, our districts are able to take advantage of high-quality, cost effective training and solutions that may otherwise be too costly to pursue on their own.

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the ways Bucks County's school districts and career and technical centers work together to realize significant cost savings. The Bucks IU is proud to serve as a regional aggregator of these services and honored to work each day with our local school districts to identify ways to offer high quality programs and services that save taxpayers money.