



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania Schools

Education Update

May 15, 2017

In State Budget News...

With both the House and Senate in session last week, there was a lot of activity in Harrisburg, although not a significant amount of forward momentum on the state budget...but it's still early. An additional option on the liquor privatization front materialized (allowing beer distributors to sell wine and liquor), although its future – and the future for most of the other liquor and/or gaming-related revenue options – remains very uncertain. Clouding over all budget talks, of course, will be the growing state fiscal deficit. As budget talks intensify, how lawmakers and the governor will decide to address that problem will be key.

In School Funding News...

Pre-K Funding – Advocates pushing for an increase in state funding for preschool programs in the 2017-18 state budget released a study last Monday that shows Pennsylvania's investment in pre-K programs is lagging behind other states. It shows 19 states and the District of Columbia have a higher per-capita investment in high-quality preschool programs than Pennsylvania, which invests \$682.17 per child, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University. Fifteen states invest more than \$1,000 per child including economic competitors New Jersey and New York. What's more, Joan Benso, president of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, said, "Sixty-four percent, two-thirds basically, of Pennsylvania 3- and 4-year-olds who are eligible for high-quality pre-k still don't get the opportunity to attend. Why? Because we don't invest enough state money." *Read the rest of the story: ["Pa.'s Investment in Preschool Lags Behind Other States, Study Shows"](#)* (from *pennlive.com*, 5/9/17).

Paying Off the Pension Debt – The debate over how to pay off Pennsylvania's roughly \$70 billion unfunded pension liability has seen some movement. The commonwealth's Independent Fiscal Office recently released an actuarial note estimating a current House measure would save up to \$18 billion by paying down the debt faster. Republican Representative John McGinnis of Blair County is sponsoring the proposal, which would jack up the state's required pension payments by about a half billion dollars in just its first year. That would shorten the time it would take to pay off the debt. But it also means the commonwealth would have to divert significant funds from other programs. McGinnis sees it as a good trade-off. "I think the proper thing is to give priority to your unpaid expenses in the past before you commit to new expenses," he said. Others aren't buying it. *Read the rest of the story: ["Despite IFO Savings Projections, Pension Plan Has Little Support"](#)* (from WITF, 5/15/17).

In Legislative News...

This Week's Legislative Schedule – Neither the House nor the Senate are in session this week. Aside from budget-related issues, the House was busy last week with committee meetings and moved several education-related bills, an optional property tax relief bill and a bill that would impose significant restrictions on reverse appeals and value commercial properties by comparing them to vacant properties. Although the House and Senate will not return to Harrisburg until May 22, behind-the-scenes discussions will continue on all fronts this week.

In Last Week's Legislative Action –

***PSBA and PSERS: [HB 205](#); passed by the House.** The bill removes future employees of the PA School Boards Association from PSERS.

***Epi-Pen Administration: [HB 224](#); passed by the Senate.** The bill, which amends the School Code, provides immunity to school bus drivers and crossing guards who administer an epi-pen to students in a manner that complies with the policies of the school district or the independent contractor that employs

them and who complete a Department of Health training program. The bill will now go to Gov. Wolf for his signature.

* **Military Recruiter Access:** [HB 524](#); amended and approved by the House Education Committee. The bill requires school entities to provide armed forces recruiters with access to lists of secondary school students (current law says “seniors”) upon request. The bill also requires school entities to notify their 10th, 11th and 12th grade students of this requirement and provides for a student opt-out process.

* **Property Tax Freeze for Qualifying Seniors:** [HB 641](#); amended and approved by the House Local Government Committee. The bill allows municipalities (including school districts) to establish optional senior property tax freeze programs for residents ages 62 or older with an income of less than \$60,000 annually and who have lived in PA for more than five years. As amended, the bill defines the process for obtaining a property tax freeze and requires the Department of Community and Economic Development to publish an annual report of the loss of property tax income to taxing districts from the freeze.

* **Clearinghouse of Online Courses:** [HB 679](#); approved by the House Education Committee. The bill creates a clearinghouse of online courses for students in grades 6-12 developed and maintained by PDE. By 2018-19 a database of online courses that contain Keystone Exam-related content must be developed. By 2019-20, a broader database of online courses offered by other providers (which can include other school entities) will be developed. School entities can contract with providers to use the courses they developed.

* **Licensing Online Schools:** [HB 857](#); approved by the House Education Committee. The bill amends the Private Academic Schools Act to allow online schools to become licensed by the State Board of Private Academic Schools.

* **Prohibition on Assessment Appeals:** [HB 1213](#); amended and approved by the House Commerce Committee. The bill prohibits a taxing district from appealing an assessment based on the purchase or sale of a property, the financing or refinancing the property or following certain investments or improvements to the property. The bill only allows taxing districts to appeal an assessment following a countywide reassessment, when the parcel has been divided or when a change has occurred in the productive use of the property. The bill was amended to include new definitions for “fee simple,” “market value,” and “real estate.” These definitions would redefine property valuation, requiring commercial properties to be valued as though they are vacant, slashing their assessments and tax liability at the expense of school districts. **PASA opposes this bill. ACTION NEEDED: It is important that you reach out to your House representatives ASAP to tell them the impact this bill would have on your district and on the homeowners in your community!**

* **Educator Training in Transition Services:** [HB 1305](#); approved by the House Education Committee. The bill requires professional educators in school entities that provide secondary transition services to students in grades 8 to 12 (or to those who are ages 14 or older) to complete training to be developed by PDE beginning in 2018-19.

* **Employment Renewal Notification Timeline:** [SB 227](#); approved by the House Education Committee. The bill changes the date of the required board action on a superintendent or assistant superintendent’s contract from 150 days prior to expiration to 90 days prior to expiration. The bill also extends the existing contract by only one year for failure to take this required action.

* **Approval of Regulations:** [SB 561](#); approved by the Senate Rules & Executive Nominations Committee. The bill requires the General Assembly and the Governor to approve all regulations with an economic impact or cost to the Commonwealth, to its political subdivisions, and to the private sector exceeding \$1 million. Under the current regulatory review process, the General Assembly must pass a concurrent resolution disapproving a regulation and the Governor must sign it to bar the governor’s own agency from enacting the regulation.

THIS WEEK: Senate Committee Calendar

Monday, May 15: Senate Education Committee's Subcommittee on Support Services and Transportation to hold a public hearing to discuss pupil transportation issues, including the proposed \$50 million cut to the transportation line item for 2017-18

In State News...

Customized Learning Model – Imagine a classroom setting where all students, despite age differences, are confident in themselves and excited to learn. Where students are not confined to categorization by class or academic achievement, but move at their own pace to improve upon skills that they need. While this may sound far-fetched, it's not that far off the mark of what Hydetown Elementary School's mass customized learning system appears to be achieving. The school, which is the first at the elementary level in the state to completely immerse itself in the mass customized learning (MCL) model, has seen a world of difference in its students on multiple fronts, according to Principal Lisa Royek. *Read the rest of the story: ["In Hydetown, a New Learning Model is Showing Positive Results"](#)* (from *The Titusville Herald*, 5/11/17).

Campaign Contributions for School Choice – Wealthy school-choice advocates, wielding millions of dollars in campaign contributions, have sought to play a powerful role in Pennsylvania politics. All told, more than \$10 million from school-choice advocates has made its way into Pennsylvania political campaigns in the past decade. *Read the rest of the story: ["School Choice Millions Pumps into Pennsylvania Campaigns"](#)* (from the AP, 5/13/17).

Impact of Testing 'Opt-Outs' – The state Department of Education allows families to have their child opt out of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments, otherwise known as PSSA exams. All families have this option as long as they notify school administrators of their choice. However, the opt out option could come at a price. "Opting out can affect how our schools are rated throughout the state," Philipsburg-Osceola Area Superintendent Gregg Paladina said. *Read the rest of the story: ["PSSA Opt Out Choice Supported by Many But Could Impact School, Teacher Evaluations"](#)* (from *The Centre Daily Times*, 5/13/17).

Across the Nation...

Alabama: Re-segregating Schools and Communities – A federal judge has granted a mostly white town in Alabama permission to secede from a racially mixed county school district and start its own system—even though she concluded that race was the main motivation for the split. Civil rights lawyers and advocates for racially mixed schools fear the ruling—should it stand—strikes another blow to decades-long efforts to desegregate schools in the South. *Read the rest of the story: ["Mostly White Alabama Town Can Split From Diverse District, Court Rules"](#)* (from *Education Week*, 5/9/17).

California: High School Exit Exam – California appears to be on the brink of eliminating its high school exit exam. In a recent 56-17 vote, the state Assembly approved Assembly Bill 830, which eliminates the California High School Exit Examination as a graduation requirement. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration. Known as CAHSEE, the test has been the target of increasing criticism in recent years as the state moved toward a system of judging schools and students that puts less emphasis on a single test. The language of AB 830 reflects that shift. The state's new accountability system promotes college and career readiness, the bill says, and provides "resources to allow the identification of pupils in academic need in lower grades. This paradigm shift moves us away from using a single test, like the CAHSEE, for making high-stakes decisions." *Read the rest of the story: ["California Close to Dumping High School Exit Exam"](#)* (from *Education Week*, 5/8/17).

Indiana: Charter Schools in the News –

*** Cyber School Failure, Reauthorization:** Indiana education officials have decided to give a long-troubled virtual charter school another chance to right its academic ship, despite earning six consecutive years' worth of failing grades from the state. Hoosier Academy Virtual School's fate has been in limbo for two years as state officials have deferred taking the extreme measure of closing the school because of its persistently low academic scores. The school serves more than 3,000 students. On Wednesday, the state board of education opted instead to ban the school from enrolling new students and slash how much the

school's authorizer can collect in administrative fees. Similar scenarios of state scrutiny and near misses involving other online charter schools have played out across the country since the early 2000s. Virtual charter schools, which collectively receive more than \$1 billion in taxpayer money each year, are rarely shut down. Hoosier Academy Virtual School is run by one of those companies, K12 Inc. which is based in Herndon, Va. K12 Inc. is the country's largest for-profit operator of full-time, online charter schools and runs effective lobbying efforts in more than 20 states, including Indiana, where, according to *Education Week's* investigation, it had spent around \$1 million dollars lobbying state lawmakers and donating to their campaigns and political parties since 2007. *Read the rest of the story: ["Indiana Virtual Charter School Escapes the Ax Again, Despite Poor Academic Record"](#)* (from *Education Week*, 5/11/17).

*** Christian College Authorizer:** A lawsuit is challenging the constitutionality of Indiana's charter school law that has allowed an evangelical Christian college to authorize public charter schools and receive public money. The Indiana Coalition for Public Education-Monroe County earlier this month filed a lawsuit to invalidate the charter of Seven Oaks Classical School in the small town of Ellettsville and halt public funding from going to the school and its authorizer, Grace College and Seminary. The school, the state's superintendent of public instruction, and the Indiana Charter School Board's executive director are named as plaintiffs. *Read the rest of the story: ["Lawsuit Challenges Religious College's Authorization of Indiana Charter School"](#)* (from *Education Week*, 5/4/17).

On the Calendar...

May 29 – PASA office closed

June 6 – Lobby Day

June 7 – Professional Development Committee meeting (virtual)

July 11-12 – New Superintendents' Academy Part 1 (PASA office)

July 23-25 – PA Educational Leadership Summit (Altoon)