



PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Legislative Committee 2011 Report

Chairman: Richard Fry
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With a new governor and changes in the General Assembly that put both chambers under the leadership of the same political party, the committee and PASA staff needed to address legislative issues with wide implications for education.

School Funding

2011-12 State Budget: PASA worked in coalition with other organizations as part of the Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign to press for, at minimum, level funding for public schools in the 2011-12 state budget. However, despite state revenue collections that were \$785.5 million, or 2.9 percent, more than anticipated, the majority in the General Assembly and the governor, intent on reducing costs without raising taxes, passed a final state budget that included an overall spending decrease of about 3 percent from 2010-11. School districts took a hard hit in the final plan, with a reduction of about \$930 million, the first time in 20 years that public schools have seen a reduction in funding from the previous year. In effect, the budget plan for education eliminated the state's commitment to the six-year funding plan based on the recommendations of the "costing-out-study."

Policy guidelines published during the summer by the governor's Office of the Budget make clear that the 2012-13 budget will be more of the same – more cuts, hold the line on taxes, no increases in spending. In 2011-12 and going forward, PASA will continue to work with the coalition to urge for a funding formula that is predictable, adequate and equitable, in light of the Corbett administration's position on education costs, spending and taxation.

Impact on School District Budgets: In September 2011 a survey of school districts conducted by PASA and the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) revealed that, with fewer available resources, school districts have increased the number of students per classroom, reduced teachers and other school staff, shrunk course offerings, imposed additional fees for extracurricular activities, and placed restrictions on field trips. PASA shared data from the survey with lawmakers and the media, noting that districts made significant cuts in programs, activities and services that either supplement student learning or serve the larger community, and that 60% of school districts reduced staff, 70% relied on reserve funds to balance their budgets, and 70% increased class size in response to funding shortfalls. PASA emphasized that the severity of the state and federal funding cuts are putting student achievement gains at risk and makes clear that, with fewer funding options going into the next budget cycle and restrictions on the authority of local officials to raise local revenues, more personnel reductions may be required against next year, when a new round of cuts in school budgets is anticipated. PASA will continue to emphasize the need for accountability coupled with adequate resources.

ESEA Reauthorization

PASA continues to participate in discussions with the PDE, the State Board of Education, state legislators and members of Congress, in concert with the AASA, on a wide variety of issues related to NCLB and the ESEA reauthorization process. Because Congress has yet to reauthorize

the law, the Obama administration is offering to states a “waiver” plan that would offer more flexibility in complying with the current law’s requirements, while requiring state action in return.

Charter/Cyber Charter Schools

In August Richard Fry testified before the House Education Committee on charter schools, urging changes in current charter school law to increase transparency, oversight and accountability of charter and cyber charter schools and changes in the way those schools are funded. Expanding the number of charter schools and taking from school boards the authority to approve charters are two of the governor’s priorities. PASA and the committee continue to urge support for changes in state law and policy that would require more PDE oversight of cyber charter schools and change the way cyber charter schools are funded.

Communication

PASA posts to the web site a weekly news summary, the Education Update, with the link e-mailed via the E-Update to all active members. Committee members participate in a conference call with Mary Webber and Jim Buckheit on weeks when the General Assembly is in session. The calls provide an opportunity to discuss “active” legislation. Following the call, Barbara Jewett provides committee members with a summary of the discussion, to be shared regionally.

Advocacy on Other Issues

Keystone Exams: Secretary of Education Ron Tomalis delayed full implementation of the new Keystone Exams for one year due to both budgetary restraints and school districts’ need to have more time to align course curriculum to the exams. Many schools participated in the pilot Keystone assessments in 2010. PASA continues to work with the Department of Education concerning implementation, particularly on issues relating to accountability, professional development, resources and integration with the newly adopted Common Core Standards.

Mandates: During state budget discussions in the spring and early summer, PASA continued to push for mandate relief as a means to focus school district resources more effectively and efficiently. Dr. Eric Eshbach, member of the committee, testified in March before the House Education Committee, urging lawmakers to grant school districts the authority to furlough for economic reasons, asking lawmakers to consider granting school districts the authority to furlough staff but utilize other performance-based measures rather than only seniority as the criteria. No furlough language was passed along with the 2011-12 state budget. As discussions for the 2012-13 state budget begin, PASA will urge lawmakers to consider implications of any new mandates on school district budgets and will continue to lobby for relief from existing mandates.

Act I: PASA opposed legislation that would have stripped all exceptions allowed under Act 1 and made a strong case that exceptions should remain for existing construction, special education and pension increases. PASA met with legislators and legislative staff and sent letters to targeted legislators on this issue. The final bill modified but retained those general exceptions.

Vouchers: Richard Fry, committee chairman, testified before the Senate Education Committee on S.B. 1, which would create a statewide school voucher program. Despite efforts by some lawmakers in the Senate to push the bill through the General Assembly, opposition to vouchers from education groups and from within the Legislature, along with budget constraints and lack of clear direction from the governor, all seemed to delay further consideration of S.B. Although making clear its opposition to the use of public funds for private education, PASA’s

willingness to discuss school choice issues generally allowed the organization to continue dialogue with legislative leaders on a variety of other educational issues.

In June members of the Legislative Committee visited with 10 key legislators, including chairmen of the House and Senate education committees. Following those meetings, the committee determined that, given the increasing number of lawmakers promoting bills creating private school voucher plans, PASA should take action to aggressively oppose all legislation to establish voucher programs, asking that these issues be addressed in any proposal: the impact of the plan on both state and local school district budgets, the impact on the overwhelming majority of students who will not utilize vouchers, and the accountability of schools receiving taxpayer funds.

Since that time, PASA continues to work actively with Pennsylvanians Opposed to Vouchers (POV). The coalition in late September sent a letter to all members of the General Assembly urging them to oppose any voucher plan.

Professional Issues: PASA continues to address a number of issues related to the superintendency, including the following:

- **Superintendent Qualifications:** In June PASA sent to members of the House and Senate a letter outlining opposition to legislation that would expand the qualification for superintendent in Pennsylvania to allow non-certificated professionals with business degrees to be hired as chief school administrators. PASA also met with legislators and staff to express concerns about the bill. The omnibus School Code bill passed in late June included language providing this expanded definition of “qualifications” for superintendent, a priority of the governor, but was modified to require an advanced business degree and “relevant” experience, and a requirement that those individuals complete the PIL program. PASA will continue to lobby against legislation and plans that de-emphasizes the educational experience and training of school leaders.
- **Superintendent Contracts:** Separation agreements, particularly those carrying a high price tag, superintendent salaries and the general content of administrative contracts have sparked a great deal of conversation in Harrisburg in 2010-11 and continuing into 2011-12. Auditor General Jack Wagner has ordered audits of recent “buyouts” of superintendents and others going forward, and several lawmakers have indicated a desire to introduce legislation limiting school boards’ authority to develop contracts, limiting the length of contracts and/or requiring transparency in separation agreements. PASA will continue to be actively involved in discussions on these issues.
- **Cost of School Administration:** In April PASA published a revised White Paper on School Administration, “Educational Efficiency in Pennsylvania,” that offered data disputing the theory that countywide school district administration is more efficient and less costly and dispelling the notion that school districts in Pennsylvania are “top-heavy” with highly-paid administrators. Copies were distributed to each member of the General Assembly and to the Secretary of Education. As some policymakers continue to call for mandatory cuts in the number of school administrators, privatizing of school management to save money or mandatory school consolidation, PASA will continue to point to real data that points to the cost-efficiency of administration throughout public schools.

PASA staff and committee members will continue to work with policymakers on these and other issues in 2011-12.