

# Education Update for January 30, 2012

from the PA Assn. of School Administrators

## In Budget News...

**Financially Distressed Schools** – As 50 placard-holding students from the ailing Chester Upland schools looked on, Republican and Democratic senators urged Gov. Tom Corbett Tuesday to develop a workable plan to aid financially distressed school districts. “We need a plan, Mr. Secretary; we need a plan,” Sen. Jeffrey Piccola, R-Dauphin, told state Education Secretary Ronald Tomalis. “It’s time to end the finger-pointing and the blame game. Taxpayers are fed up with the increasing costs of public education.” *Read the rest of the story: [“Corbett Asked to Aid Poor Schools”](#)* (from *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1/25/12)

In addition to the hearing, Gov. Corbett met with members of the General Assembly last week to discuss the fiscal crisis facing Chester Upland. The governor pledged to work with lawmakers to deliver a long-term solution to the problem and fund the schools through the current fiscal year in the short-term.

Meanwhile, members of the Duquesne City school board last week announced they are calling a community meeting on Feb. 7 to try to get some answers on the future of the school district. State officials have said the financially and academically failing K-8 district, which is operated by a state board of control, will likely not exist in its current form next year but have offered no details as to where the students will attend school. *Read the rest of the story: [“Duquesne School Board Presses for Answers”](#)* (from *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1/25/12)

**Chester Upland and Charter Schools** – The Chester Upland SD was on the verge of bankruptcy last month, and the Corbett administration initially declined to provide additional support. However a federal judge ordered the state to advance the district \$3.2 million. According to most estimates, the district needs \$20 million to finish the school year.

Court documents in a suit to force the state to continue support for the financially distressed Chester Upland SD and testimony during a House Appropriations hearing last Friday in Chester revealed the following about the district’s finances and its relationship to the Chester Community Charter School (CCCS):

- The district spends \$43 million on all charter schools. Between \$40-\$41 million of that is spent on brick and mortar charter schools.
- The district owes the Delaware County I.U. \$1.7 million.
- Chester Upland gets \$5 million for special education, about \$3,605 per identified student. The district in turn pays the CCCS \$24,500 for each identified child.
- Starting in February 2011 through the fall of 2011, in months where the CCCS lost overall students, it increased the number of special education students, resulting in a new increase in the invoice to the district.
- The CCCS student population of 3,000 is comprised of 700 special needs students, or 23% of the student body.
- CSMI, the management company for CCCS, gets paid \$5,600 per student attending the school, a number that will rise to \$6,400 per pupil in 2014-15. In other words, 57% of district payments are targeted to management fees, not instruction, for each general education student, and 23% for each special needs child.

**Liquor Taxes for Schools** – Philadelphia City Council is brewing up a new idea – using booze to fund schools. During Council’s first session since the inauguration, City Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds

Brown introduced a bill that would extend bar hours to 3 a.m., generating up to \$5 million annually in liquor taxes for the cash-poor school districts, which announced recently that it must cut \$61 million by June. *Read the rest of the story:* [“New \\$5M Source for Schools: Longer Bar Hours”](#) (from *The Philadelphia Daily News*, 1/27/12)

### **Editorials on Education Funding -**

- **Need for Funding:** His fans are calling Gov. Corbett courageous for ignoring impassioned pleas to drop his pledge not to raise taxes. The governor would show more courage if he admitted the state’s financial situation without new revenue is becoming untenable – especially when it comes to all the public schools across Pennsylvania in financial trouble. *Read the rest of the editorial:* [“Public Schools Facing Crisis”](#) (from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1/29/12)
- **Gov. Corbett and Education Funding:** Corbett is already known among some Pennsylvania parents as a foe of primary and secondary education, given his first budget’s massive cuts to public schools that led to a swarm of local property tax hikes (capped at levels mostly insufficient to make up the difference). Now, it appears that college students somehow earned his enmity as well. Education has long been targeted by conservatives and spending ideologues eager to curry favor with pressed or just plain greedy taxpayers. Unfortunately for them, the economy is – for the moment – mostly failing to play nice with their narrative. Hence the need for [the administration to inflate] revenue projections: When they fail to materialize, suddenly there’s a manufactured reason to bleat about the need to freeze already-appropriated spending. *Read the rest of the editorial:* [“Corbett’s Request for Spending Freeze Alarms Educators”](#) (from *The Daily Local*, 1/27/12)

### **In Legislative News...**

**Legislative Schedule** – The House and Senate will not be in session this week. Both chambers will return to session on February 6 in preparation for the Governor’s 2012-13 budget address on Tuesday, February 7.

**More Legislator Retirements** – Sen. John Pippy (R-Allegheny), Rep. John Myers (D-Philadelphia) and Rep. Camille “Bud” George (D-Clearfield) have announced they will not seek re-election. Pippy was first elected to the House in 1997 and to the Senate in 2003. Myers was elected to the House in 1995. George has been a member of the House since 1975.

**Committee Schedule** – The Senate Education Committee will hold a public hearing this Wednesday (Feb. 1) on [SB 1381](#) (amends the School Code requiring an employment history review for prospective employees).

### **In State News...**

**Redistricting Plan Invalidated** – A divided [Pennsylvania Supreme Court](#) on Wednesday invalidated a plan to redraw state House and Senate district lines, calling the redistricting approach “contrary to law.” The ruling, which marks the first time the court has rejected a redistricting plan, throws into disarray plans by candidates and parties for this year’s General Assembly races. The two-page order sending the plan back to the [Legislative Reapportionment Commission](#) said current district lines will remain until the commission comes up with a new plan that passes legal muster, which could mean that changes might not take effect for two years. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Pa. Supreme Court Throws Out Redistricting Plan for State House and Senate”](#) (from the Associated Press, as published by *The Patriot News*, 1/25/12)

**Charter Schools and ‘Hospitalized’ Students** – Last week the Department of Education clarified language in the PDE’s Charter School Basic Education Circular (BEC) pertaining to the institutionalization of students.

The BEC states that, “when a student is enrolled in a charter school, but becomes institutionalized (not placed there by the charter school), the charter school shall remove the student from its rolls and notify the student’s school district of residence about the institutionalization. The student’s school district of residence shall thereafter be responsible for the payment of tuition to the host school district (where the institution is located) pursuant to 24 P.S. §§ 1306 and 1308. However, if a charter school places a student in a program located outside the charter school facility, the charter school is responsible for paying for that program.”

According to the PDE, based on this language in the BEC, some charter schools have unilaterally withdrawn students from their schools when students were placed in hospital settings for mental health treatment. These students were then refused automatic readmission to the charter schools and were required to enter a lottery system for readmission.

The department last week clarified last week that it does not consider students placed in hospital settings, whether for physical or mental health treatment, as being institutionalized. “Charter schools cannot unilaterally withdraw students placed in hospital settings for treatment of a physical injury; likewise, charter schools cannot unilaterally withdraw students placed in hospital settings for mental health care,” the PDE guidance states. “If a student requires placement in a hospital settings for either physical or mental health care, the school in which the student is enrolled is responsible for providing some education to the student or paying for educational services provided to the student by the facility. Thus a student placed in a hospital setting, whether for physical or mental health treatment, should remain enrolled in the charter schools (unless withdrawn voluntarily by the parent/guardian), the charter school should either provide or pay for the educational services, and the student should return to the charter school upon discharge from the hospital setting.”

**Editorial: Managing School Choice** – “The fundamental concept behind school choice is that multiple options will help to improve all education, including in public schools that lose students to charter schools, or through tuition vouchers and similar devices,” states the editors of *The Times-Tribune* in a recent editorial. “Competition, the concept holds, will force public schools to improve in order to retain students who once were captive but have been endowed with mobility. There are examples of the concept working but it hardly is universal. At Chester Upland, one of the commonwealth’s poorest and lowest-performing districts, the rise of charter schools helps students who are able to transfer but appears to be hurting the district’s basic ability to compete.” *Read the rest of the editorial: [“State Needs Sound Course for Charters”](#)* (1/28/12)

## Across the State...

**Sharing Savings** – Last year, during contract negotiations, the Quakertown School support staff union agreed to work with the administration to find ways to save the district money. If any of those ideas panned out, a portion of the money saved would be given back to the support staff members. The first of those ideas is about to be implemented. *Read the rest of the story: [“District Looking for Money in the Mail”](#)* (from *phillyburbs.com*, 1/27/12)

## In National News...

**School Lunch Changes** – U.S. schoolchildren, accustomed to a steady diet of pizza and French fries, will find more fruits, vegetables and whole grains on their cafeteria trays under new government school rules announced last week. In addition to doubling produce servings, the new guidelines call for fat-free and low-fat milk only, child-appropriate portion sizes and reductions in sodium, saturated fat and trans fats. *Read the rest of the story: [“More Fruits, Veggies in U.S. School Lunch Rules”](#)* (from

Reuters.com, 1/25/12). Details of the new guidelines and suggestions for implementation are available on the [U.S. Department of Education web site](#).

**Test Scores and ‘Teacher Value’** – In a new, widely publicized study that closely tracked 2.5 million students over 20 years to determine whether teachers who helped raise children’s test scores have a lasting effect on their lives, researchers conclude that having such a teacher improved students’ odds of going to a good college, the quality of the neighborhoods where they live and their lifetime earnings. “The results have created a big stir because they seem to say that no matter what we think of all the standardized testing going on in education today, the scores are at least a measure of what matters in the long run. That is not exactly what the research paper shows. While it is impressive for its scope and creativity, there is a major caution: it is largely based on test scores from the 1990s, that low-stakes era when my son enjoyed his fourth-grade test.” So writes Michael Winerip in *The New York Times*. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Study on Teacher Value Uses Data From Before Teach-to-Test Era”](#) (1/15/12)

**Teacher Evaluation and Principals’ Time** – The direction of education reform – and the requirements of the federal government’s Race to the Top competition in particular – means numerous states are now planning to use tough new evaluation systems based at least in part on student growth, tracked by value-added test scores. But as the first states begin implementing these systems on a broad scale, some are encountering pushback not just from teachers – which is somewhat expected – but from principals and other administrators. In some cases they question the practicality of the new system, and in others the entire premise on which it’s built. And even a few supporters of rigorous – and high-stakes – teacher evaluation wonder whether rushing them in might backfire. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Under Education Reform, School Principals Swamped by Teacher Evaluations”](#) (from *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1/26/12)

**Value of Liberal Arts Education** – Recent college graduates who as seniors scored highest on a standardized test to measure how well they think, reason and write – skills most associated with a liberal arts education – were far more likely to be better off financially than those who scored lowest, says a new survey released last week by the Social Science Research Council, an independent organization. It found that students who had mastered the ability to think critically, reason analytically and write effectively by their senior year were: three times less likely to be unemployed than those who hadn’t, half as likely to be living with their parents, and far less likely to have amassed credit card debt. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Liberal Arts Education Lends an Edge in Down Economy”](#) (from *USA Today*, 1/25/12)

**Funding Cuts for Foreign Language Instruction** – The U.S. Department of Education program that funded \$27 million worth of foreign language education grants – which were split by a mix of 55 charter schools, school districts, and states – was cut in the recent budget bill, leaving the future of foreign language classes at these schools in jeopardy. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Education Funding for Foreign Languages Cut”](#) (from *US News and World Report*, 1/16/12)

**Special Education Rates** – An analysis of U.S. Department of Education data shows that the percentage of students in special education varies widely among states. While Rhode Island tops the country at 18 percent, Texas, at 9 percent, is at the bottom. Pennsylvania is at 16.8%, sixth highest in the nation. The average percentage across all states is 13 percent, and two-thirds of states are above that number, according to the data. Those differences could have major financial implications for states. And if the Budget Control Act of 2011 goes into effect, special education would be among the many federal programs hit with an 8 to 9 percent cut – a reduction of about \$1 billion in special education aid. *Read the rest of the story:* [“State Special Education Rates Vary Widely”](#) (from *stateline.org*, 1/24/12)

## Across the Nation...

**Illinois: Digital Divide** – On a recent Friday morning, 15-year-old Jerod Franklin stared at his hands as he labored to type of memories of the first time he grilled steak. Next to him, classmate Brittany Levy tackled a piece about a trip to the hospital. The Bronzeville Scholastic Institute ninth-graders were

working on writing assignments in the school's homework lab, whose 24 computers are shared by nearly a thousand students from the three schools that occupy DuSable High School's campus on the South Side of Chicago. At a time when awareness of technology and its potential uses in school is growing nationally, this public high school of 550 often feels like a poster child for the so-called digital divide. *Read the rest of the story:* ["As Some Schools Plunge Into Technology, Poor Schools Are Left Behind"](#) (from *The Hechinger Report*, as published in *The Chicago Tribune*, 1/25/12)

**Texas: Over-Testing** – State Board of Education members pressed the Texas education commissioner on Thursday about whether an abundance of high-stakes standardized testing is warping classroom teaching to ensure students more time preparing for the exams than actual learning. Robert Scott, head of the Texas Education Agency, responded that having kids cram is "a perversion of what's intended" and that tests are supposed to ensure students don't fall through the cracks while holding teachers and school districts accountable. "Perversion? It's being truthful about what's happened in many schools, that testing has taken over," said Republican board member and Dallas English teacher George Clayton. "That's all we do is test and prepare for tests. Make an assessment, look at the data, prepare another test; from August until the end of the school year." *Read the rest of the story:* ["Education Officials Decry 'Over-Testing' in Texas"](#) (from *The Houston Chronicle*, 1/26/12)

**Wisconsin: Accountability System** – In Wisconsin, the state could more aggressively intervene in the lowest-performing publicly funded schools under a proposed accountability system unveiled Monday. The system could rate schools on a scale of 0 to 100 based on student performance and growth on state tests, closing achievement gaps and preparing students for college and careers. Ratings also would be tied to dropout rates and third-grade literacy levels. Under the proposal, which would require legislative approval, Wisconsin would for the first time have a system to reward the best and reform the worst public schools – including charter schools and private schools that enroll publicly funded voucher students. *Read the rest of the story:* ["First Details of Proposed School Accountability System Revealed"](#) (from *The Wisconsin State Journal*, 1/24/12)

## On the Calendar...

- Feb. 9 – Legislative Committee meeting (PASA office)
- Feb. 15 – Leadership for Teaching Module 2b (PASA office)
- Feb. 16-19 – AASA National Conference on Education (Houston)
- Feb. 22 – Commonwealth Budget Seminar (Grantville)
- Feb. 23 – Commonwealth Budget Seminar (Mars)
- Feb. 24 – Commonwealth Budget Seminar webcast