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PASA POINTS

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

About PASA

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) is an organization that is instrumental in developing successful school leadership through advocacy, support, sustainment of high-quality school administrators and a statewide collegial network.

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Federal stimulus dollars will not offset rising costs of ongoing mandated school expenses, including PSERS and charter schools.

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Why School Districts Need Subsidy Increases in the Coming Year

According to a McKinsey & Co. Report, *COVID-19, and Learning Loss, Disparities Grow and Students Need Help*, issued in December 2020, there was significant learning loss among students from March to June 2020 based on school district diagnostic assessments in the fall of 2020. On average, American students from kindergarten to fifth grade have missed out on 20% of the reading and 33% of the math skills they would have learned in normal times. For students of color, those numbers go up to 23% and 41% for reading and math, respectively.

Consequently, schools will need to implement both short-term and long-term plans to offset the learning loss that has occurred since the onset of the pandemic. This will require significant funds, resources and personnel beyond what most schools have in place now.

Additionally, the social and emotional toll of the pandemic on our students and staff will also need to be addressed by our schools in conjunction with academic recovery initiatives. Several families experienced financial losses as well as family deaths due to the virus, causing grief and stress with limited opportunities to console one another. The isolation and anxiety of the pandemic has negatively affected the wellbeing of students. Many experts believe that students will need increased mental health and counseling services to help them recover.

There is significant need for additional counselors, social workers, nurses and psychologists in our schools. Unfortunately, there are few financial resources available to pay for these additional positions. Federal stimulus funds will be available for the next few years, but the need for these services will go well beyond that time frame. We all know that stimulus dollars should not be used for personnel and ongoing annual mandated expenses such as PSERS and charter school tuition increases. Federal funds should only be used for immediate or one-time expenses.

Increased professional services and personnel must be factored into the state budget discussion, along with long-term mandated district expenditures for retirement, charter school tuition and special education. Our schools need significant subsidy increases in the coming year to meet the immediate and ongoing challenges or recovering from the pandemic. This effort will extend well beyond the time frame that federal stimulus dollars are available, and districts will need stable funding to pay for these critical services.

It's Time for a Reasonable Cyber Charter School Tuition Rate

During the summer of 2020, school districts purchased new technology and technology services for students and staff. Significant and targeted professional development was provided to school staff to prepare for a variety of learning models for use in the new year. Teachers, principals and learning support staff entered the 2020-21 year much better prepared to teach students in the new learning models being used by their district.

While cyber charter schools were spending millions of dollars on slick advertising campaigns throughout the summer to attract families to their online programs, traditional school districts were working diligently over the summer to re-tool their on-line capability to offer quality cyber learning to students if the districts were not able to hold in-person or hybrid learning. School districts do not have millions of dollars in their budgets to allocate to advertising campaigns and would be severely criticized by their stakeholders if they expended funds in this manner.

Traditional public schools focused their resources this past summer on professional development for their teachers and the acquisition of technology to improve online learning options. This is another frustrating example and clear indicator that cyber charter school tuition rates are exceedingly higher than needed to operate their programs.

School district educators have become much more adept at using virtual learning platforms to teach their students and provide ongoing support to them in the learning process over the internet. As the school year has progressed, we have seen teachers become more and more proficient in this instructional model and, as a result, our students have had growth. Additionally, teachers working in a hybrid or full in-person model have learned to navigate the many nuances of required social distancing and mask-wearing while conducting instruction throughout the school day. Although these mitigation strategies are cumbersome, teachers have found a way to make the learning process work for their students.

In all, teachers and learning support staff have done a heroic job in delivering instruction to their students to meet the academic standards established by the state. They have pursued their instruction with the same rigor as they did during normal circumstances and have expected the same level of commitment from their students. Our superintendents, principals, teachers and learning support staff members clearly understand that this cannot be a lost year of instruction for Pennsylvania's children and have worked diligently to deliver quality lessons to students.

Governor Wolf has recommended one flat rate for cyber charter school tuition that all districts would pay. The rate is set at approximately \$9,500 for the 2021-22 academic year. PASA contends that this rate is well beyond what cyber charter schools need to operate their programs fairly and profitably, as school districts are running their own cyber learning programs at a much lower cost with much better results. However, we support the governor's plan to set a flat rate at a more reasonable level than what is currently in place. If the governor's modest plan is approved, districts would save about \$130 million next year, which could be used for pandemic recovery personnel and programs.

Charter school tuition rates increased 185% over a ten-year period in Pennsylvania from the 2008-09 school year to the 2018-19 school year. During this same period, school district salaries have increased 9.6% and the combined U.S. inflation rate was 16.5%. It is clearly time to adjust the tuition rates of cyber charter schools.