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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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Approximately 20% of Superintendents in PA left their position in 2021.

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State of the Superintendency in PA

PASA is concerned about the impact of the pandemic on school system leadership. The pandemic has put a significant strain on school district leadership over the past two years with issues such as masking, contact tracing, racism and equity becoming red flags within many communities. It has been difficult for superintendents and school leaders to navigate these issues while doing their best to educate students in an unpredictable situation.

Issues related to the pandemic and social/cultural issues fed by social media, devolving into a political debate on the local, state and federal level, have often led to superintendents becoming the target of criticism from parents and community members. The result is a very stressful environment for superintendents. Numerous changes in the superintendency have occurred over the past year both in Pennsylvania and across the nation. The 2021 calendar year saw 97 of the 500 superintendent positions change hands in Pennsylvania with many more projected to change in 2022. Nationally, 25% of superintendents left their position last year, and approximately 3,000 more superintendent vacancies are expected in the coming year in the 13,500 public school districts across America.

"There's no doubt that we are seeing the greatest exodus of leadership at the district level that we have seen in this country," Dan Domenech, executive director of the School Superintendents Association (AASA), recently told *Newsweek* (12/23/21). ***"The numbers that are just walking out the door, the numbers that are retiring early and the numbers that are being fired because of the controversies that exist around the country... The turnaround is significant."***

There is significant concern about the loss of experienced school system leaders at a time when that leadership is sorely needed as it could negatively impact stability and continuity in school systems. Combined with the teacher and school personnel shortage, PASA is concerned that the next few years may result in unprecedented instability in our schools.

Teacher and School Personnel Shortage Continues

As reported in an earlier edition of PASA Points, the teacher and school personnel shortage continue to weigh heavily on school districts. Not only is it difficult to hire and maintain a full complement of professional educators and support staff to operate school district programs and services, the rate of illness and loss of work time caused by the current Omicron variant has caused tremendous instability in our schools.

Frontline Education recently conducted a survey of 1,200 school leaders across the nation regarding the school personnel shortage. The survey showed that 67% of respondents reported teacher shortages in their districts. While many rural school systems cited their location as a major factor behind their teacher shortage, districts in all settings are struggling. Teacher shortages were reported as follows:

- 75% of districts in cities of any size reported shortages
- 65% of rural districts reported shortages
- 60% of suburban districts reported shortages

Respondents reported the following three reasons for the teacher shortage:

1. **A lack of fully qualified applicants.** The most common reason given for districts' shortages is that there simply are not enough fully qualified applicants. The most difficult positions reported to fill are:
 - a. Special Education Teachers
 - b. Substitute Teachers
 - c. Secondary Math Teachers
 - d. Paraprofessionals
 - e. Secondary Physical Science
 - f. Bilingual Education
2. **Salary and/or benefits are lacking compared to other careers.** This is a difficult issue as most district budgets already allocate 75%-80% of their budgets to salaries and benefits. Yet this survey indicates that other careers offer better salaries and benefits, making it difficult to attract young people into the teaching profession.
3. **Fewer new education school graduates.** Whether undergraduate students shy away from the low salaries associated with teaching or they perceive educators are treated unfairly by students, parents or the community, education schools just aren't attracting as many enrollees as they used to. Pennsylvania has seen a 67% reduction in enrollment in teacher preparation programs over the past decade.

In regard to paraprofessionals, the survey found that paraprofessionals and substitute teachers may have determined that the relatively low wages simply were not worth the risks of working during a pandemic. The shortage of school bus drivers and cafeteria staff have also created significant disruptions, as transporting students to and from school and ensuring they are fed are critical components to school operations and learning.

Policymakers, educational leaders, and higher education institutions need to work together to reverse these trends in order to ensure an effective and stable public education system.