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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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Meeting student mental health needs is one of the greatest challenges for school districts coming out of the pandemic.

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Student Mental Health Remains a High Concern

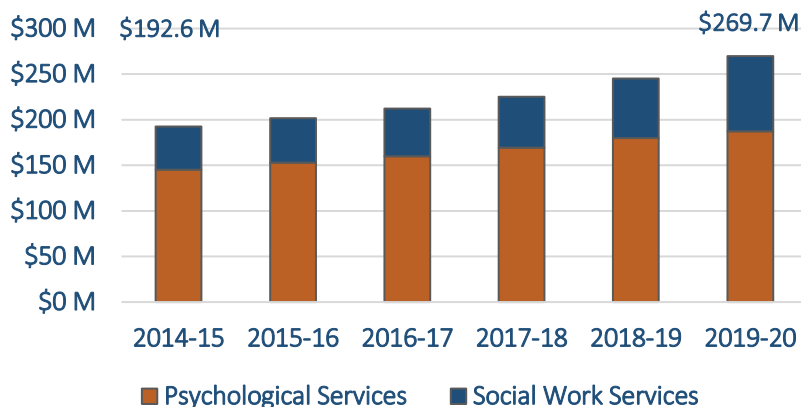
Student and staff mental health issues are one of the top concerns for superintendents across the state. Nearly three-fourths of respondents in the most recent PASA-PASBO-PARSS Survey stated they are using federal ESSER dollars to assist their students with mental health concerns.

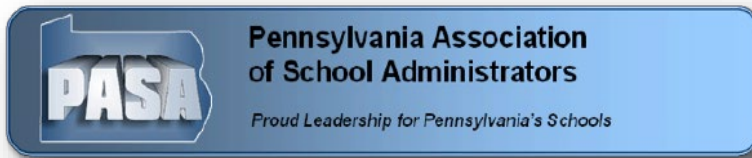
Prior to the pandemic, there was growing concern about the epidemic of mental health issues facing our school-aged students across the nation. Much had been written and documented about the critical need for more mental health services in our schools to assist our children. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues and increased the need for mental health personnel and programs in our schools.

As one Superintendent stated, *“The greatest challenges for the remainder of the school year are the mental health, as well as the social and emotional aspects, for students and staff as we transcend through this pandemic. There are simply not enough professional and support staff personnel in our schools to service and support students and staff with these issues.”*

District expenditures are significantly increasing for mental health services and more help is needed from the state to provide staff and programming for school students.

Increase of District Investment in Mental Health Services





PASA Remains Opposed to Voucher Legislation

PASA is adamantly opposed to recently introduced House Bill 2169 and any legislation that would establish voucher “scholarships” for public education students attending the lowest performing schools in Pennsylvania. This is yet another attempt to further expand education vouchers in Pennsylvania, a step that will take critical taxpayer revenue from local school districts and divert it to non-public schools with no financial or academic accountability to the public. This scheme will reduce educational opportunities for many more students than it will assist through the scholarship process by reducing programs and resources in schools that are in desperate need of increased staffing and assistance.

House Bill 2169 fails to establish legitimate academic accountability for the voucher program. In fact, the only source of academic accountability is a parent satisfaction survey administered by the Pennsylvania Treasury. The bill does **not** require the use of state assessments or other assessments to measure the academic achievement of the children attending non-public schools via a voucher. Yet, testing results of public schools are critical to identifying who is eligible for these scholarships. It simply is not rational to expect our public schools to undergo annual academic testing each year for academic accountability purposes but not require non-public schools to do so when they are receiving public tax dollars.

This voucher program gives the false impression of seeking to help students receiving special education services when, in fact, it could have a detrimental outcome on special needs students as a result of likely funding cuts to public schools. Nonpublic schools are **not** governed by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), which guarantees a student with disabilities and his/her parents with significant rights, services and protections related to the student’s education. HB 2169 and similar voucher bills prohibit the state or its agencies from regulating participating entities, including a non-public school. This effectively means the state would be prohibited from requiring a nonpublic school enrolling voucher recipients to comply with IDEA or state regulations governing special education – even though additional resources would be allocated under the proposed voucher program to provide educational supports and services to students with disabilities. We believe many families may learn, too late, that their IDEA rights do not apply to non-public school entities and result in needed services not being administered to their children.

Student eligibility under the program and other voucher schemes could end up being a handout to wealthy families. For example, the bill requires that an “eligible student” reside in the boundaries of a low-achieving school. The definition of “low-achieving school” references the term used under the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) program created in 2012. Therefore, it’s yet another state program targeting the same student population. There is no guarantee that House Bill 2169 will help or prioritize children from economically disadvantaged families as there are no income limits for families to receive the voucher, which means the voucher can subsidize a wealthier family’s private school tuition. We find it objectionable that public tax dollars could be pulled from low-income schools to be given to wealthy families to help fund a private education for their children.

PASA is confident that House Bill 2169 and similar voucher proposals lack support from the majority of voting parents and community members when given the option of keeping their tax dollars in their local school vs. sending it to a non-public school with no public accountability. Most parents want to see their local schools adequately funded and struggling schools given the resources they need to improve the academic achievement of their students while being held financially accountable for their results. Vouchers are poor public policy and are not the answer to enhance education for the children of the Commonwealth who are in the most need of quality educational services.