In Budget & Finance News...

**House Education Funding Bill** – Legislation recently approved by the U.S. House of Representatives for FY 2021 would increase K-12 spending on disadvantaged students by roughly $250 million, along with funding boosts for special education, teacher training, and more. The Democrat-controlled House approved a series of spending bills by a vote of 217-197 that included $73.5 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, funding that would provide $6.9 billion more than proposed by President Donald Trump earlier this year, and $716 million higher than current Education Department spending in fiscal 2020. However, while fiscal 2021 is due to start Oct. 1, it is unlikely that Congress will enact new spending levels before that date. Between the focus on the coronavirus and a looming presidential election, it could be a few months before Congress finalizes a spending deal. (from Education Week, 8/3/20)

**Grants to CT Centers** – Governor Wolf recently announced he is dedicating approximately $10.5 million to Career and Technical Education Centers (CTC) to assist them in implementing public health and safety plans and help them to resume operations. CTC Equity grants provide funding to support effective continuity of education programs such as summer and other expanded programming, and industry credential assessments for students enrolled in CTCs negatively impacted by COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Grants were calculated based on the allocation formula for federal Perkins CTC grants, which takes into account the population of students ages 5-17 and the percent of poverty within the same age group. In addition, the formula includes a factor to account for a local education agency’s overall student enrollment in career and technical education programs.

Coronavirus Resources & Guidance...

**High School Sports** –

* Governor's Press Release: Last week Thursday the Wolf Administrator announced that the PA Departments of Health and Education now jointly recommend that Pre-K-12 school and recreational youth sports be postponed until at least January 1, 2021 to protect children and teens from COVID-19. Noting that this was a "strong recommendation and not an order or mandate," the governor stated that school administrators and locally elected school boards should make decisions on sports.

The press release highlighted several recommendations to pause youth sports until Jan. 1, 2021:
* Applies to team and individual, school and non-school recreational youth sports;
* Includes competitions, intramural play and scrimmages;
* Continue conditioning, drills and other training activities on an individual basis;
* Does not apply to collegiate and professional sports;
* Gathering limits remain unchanged – no more than 25 persons may gather indoors and 250 outdoors.

The administration has updated existing sports guidance to reflect this recommendation.

* PIAA Response: In response to the governor’s announcement, the PIAA released a statement concerning the high school athletic schedule for 2020-21 announcing that voluntary workouts, per the Governor’s Guidance for All Sports, and with local approval, may continue, but mandatory fall sports activities are paused until the PIAA Board reconvenes on August 21. Noting that school districts have been working diligently to develop health and safety plans in accordance with state guidance for a return to sports, the PIAA expressed concern both about the impact of the recommendation on students and continually changing guidance. “The Board believes that the Governor’s strong recommendation to delay sports to January 1, 2021 has a potential negative impact on the students’ physical, social, emotional and mental health,” they said. “PIAA is asking the Governor, along with the Departments of Health and Education, to partner with us and work collaboratively to further discuss fall sports. We are also seeking insight and discussion from the Pennsylvania General Assembly.”
Web Resources – PASA’s web page concerning the Coronavirus and Pandemic Preparation includes links to information about issues such as school athletics and return-to-school, along with updated guidance from the PDE, CDC and USDE, and other important updates from the state and federal levels.

Return-to-School Issues...

Suspending Immunizations – Last month the Department of Health announced that, in response to the impact of the COVID-19 disaster emergency on the availability of immunizations before the start of the school year, it was temporarily suspending immunization requirements for school entry with Governor Wolf's authorization as conferred in the March 6, 2020 Proclamation of Disaster Emergency.

Specifically, the Department is temporarily suspending the regulations at 28 Pa. Code § 23.83, which provides the list of immunizations a child must have and the grades for which the child must have them; 28 Pa. Code § 23.85, which states that children who do not meet the requirements should be excluded and places certain duties on schools to verify that children with medical exceptions who are on a plan to get their immunizations actually obtain the vaccinations; and 28 Pa. Code § 23.86, which requires schools to report to the Department the numbers of vaccinations and children taking exceptions; and 28 Pa. Code § 27.77(b), which requires that a child currently enrolled in a child care program maintain updated immunizations in accordance with federal guidelines.

The regulations are suspended for a two-month period after the beginning of the school year or the beginning of enrollment in an early childhood education program.

Racial Injustice & Inequality...

Resources: Conversations about Racial Inequality – In light of recent events in Pennsylvania and across the country, PASA has compiled and posted a list of resources to assist school leaders and educators to facilitate conversations and initiatives addressing racial inequality in schools and communities. [Click here](#) for the list.

In the PA Legislature...

Session Schedule – Both the House and Senate remain in recess.

Testimony on Return-to-School – Dr. Shane Hotchkiss, superintendent of the Bermudian Springs SD and chairman of the PASA Legislative Committee, was among those testifying last Wednesday before the House Education Committee concerning a safe return to school. “While school leaders have been given the unprecedented responsibility to open their schools safely during a pandemic, it has been extremely difficult to make those plans when the public health information about the virus changes on a regular basis and guidance continues to evolve,” he said. “Everyone wants to see schools open and get back to a sense of normalcy that will provide stability to students and their families. The question is who should be making decisions about safely operating our schools during a health pandemic.”

While stating that school leaders are working tirelessly to ensure a safe return to school, Hotchkiss asked that the General Assembly, in conjunction with the Governor, provide additional limited liability coverage for school districts during the remainder of the pandemic. He also encouraged the legislature to provide temporary assistance to school districts in the coming year by creating an easier path for individuals to become certified teachers in Pennsylvania, urged an immediate focus on expanding broadband and connectivity in underserved communities, called for giving districts flexibility in counting instructional days/hours, and urged the General Assembly and the Governor to ensure that student transportation expenses in the 2020-21 school year do not create a financial loss for school districts. “We ask that our policymakers and all school stakeholders support our school leaders during this unprecedented time as the next few weeks unfold in a time of great uncertainty and anxiety,” he concluded.

Committee Schedule – The House and Senate continue committee meetings and hearings this summer, most of them coronavirus-related.

Tuesday, August 11
House Democratic Policy Committee
2:00 p.m., Room G-50, Irvis Office Building
public hearing on COVID-19 testing challenges

**Wednesday, August 19**
House and Senate Education Committees
1:00 p.m. – Senate Chamber
joint public hearing on reopening K-12 schools (PDE and DOH to testify)

In Other State News…

**Secretary Rivera Resignation** – Last week, Secretary of Education Pedro Rivera announced that, after the start of the school year, he will be transitioning from his role as PDE secretary to the president of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology in Lancaster. “I am extremely proud of all that we have accomplished together as an education community,” he said in the announcement. “Even sometimes when the odds seemed impossible and conditions insurmountable, together we focused on creating an environment conducive to serving our learners, through innovation, passion and partnership.”

He also noted the challenges brought on by the pandemic. “This pandemic underscored the inequities that exist across our communities, which was intensified by civil unrest and backlash over systemic racism and biases against our black and brown friends, neighbors and communities,” he said. “We continue to have much work to do in this space as a collective education community, and I know it will continue to be a focused priority of the administration and PDE. The importance of our work has never been more important than it is today. This feeling is what drove me, not to say goodbye, but to again become a leader in the field and an educational stakeholder to join in the fight for equity, access and opportunity.”

**Safe2Say Reports and the Pandemic** – Reports of suicidal or self-harming thoughts made to Pennsylvania's mandatory harm reporting system for schools increased after classrooms were shut down in March because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Pennsylvania attorney general's office released an annual report showing tips to the Safe2Say Something program had dropped since the pandemic sent students home for remote learning, The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reported Friday. But an increased portion of the calls, online tips and other reports that did come in were for issues of suicidal thoughts or self-harm, data from the system showed. Between July 2019 and March 13, when Governor Tom Wolf ordered schools closed for the remainder of the year, about 17 % of tips were related to those two categories. Between March 13 and the end of June, tips related to suicide or self-harm jumped to 37 % of all reports. Read the rest of the story: “More Calls about Self-Harm, Suicidal Thoughts Made to Pa. Schools Hotline after Quarantine” (from The Patriot-News, 8/8/20).

**Pennsylvania Designation for Special Education** – The PDE announced last week that Pennsylvania has received has received the highest level of determination – “Meets Requirements” – that the U.S. Department of Education’s (USDE) Office of Special Education Programs awards to states under Part B of the IDEA. Pennsylvania was one of 22 states and territories to receive the distinction this year. The determination is based on the totality of the commonwealth’s special education data and information, including the federal fiscal year 2018 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR), other state-reported data, and additional publicly available information. Consistent with USDE’s Results Driven Accountability, 2020 determinations were based on the commonwealth’s compliance with the regulatory requirements of the IDEA as well as the positive outcomes being achieved for students.

In making Part B determinations in 2020, the Office of Special Education Programs considered the following data for students with disabilities: participation on regular statewide assessments; participation and performance on the most recently administered (school year 2018-19) National Assessment of Educational Progress; graduation with a regular high school diploma; and dropout rates. The commonwealth has been recognized with the “Meets Requirements” designation for 13 of the 14 years that USDE has been issuing its determinations.

In National News…

**Education Grants for Religious Organizations** – States and local governments that administer funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Education must give qualified religious organizations the same consideration they give nonreligious groups when they award subgrants, new guidance from the agency says. The guidance, announced by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos Friday, also creates a federal process for individuals and
organizations to file complaints under the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act. "Too many misinterpret the 'separation of church and state' as an invitation for government to separate people from their faith," DeVos said in a statement. "In reality, the First Amendment doesn't exist to protect us from religion. It exists to protect religion from government." The document largely restates the Trump administration's previously announced positions on religion and education, including those mentioned in a January executive order on religious freedom. It also cites a June ruling in Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a Montana prohibition on families from using state tax-credit scholarships at religious schools was an unconstitutional violation of religious freedom. When awarding federal education grant funds, the Education Department and its grantees cannot discriminate "against otherwise eligible recipients by disqualifying them from a public benefit solely because of their religious character," the guidance says. Read the rest of the story: “DeVos: Give Religious Groups Equal Consideration for Education Grants” (from Education Week, 8/7/20).

Appeals Court Ruling in Transgender Case – A federal appeals court has ruled that a Florida school district's policy barring a transgender male student from the boys' restroom violated the student's rights under both the equal-protection clause and Title IX. The panel said that student Drew Adams's Title IX claim was bolstered by the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in Bostock v. Clayton County, Ga., that transgender workers are protected from discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Read the rest of the story: “Federal Appeals Court Backs Transgender Student on School Restroom Use” (from Education Week, 8/9/20).

Ending the Census Early – With the Trump administration's decision to end the 2020 census count four weeks early, the Census Bureau now has to accomplish what officials have said it cannot do: accurately count the nation’s hardest-to-reach residents — nearly four of every 10 households — in just six weeks. The result is both a logistical challenge of enormous proportions that must take place in the middle of a pandemic, and yet another political crisis for the census, historically a nonpartisan enterprise. The announcement immediately generated sharp criticism. The decision to shorten the counting schedule is a U-turn from the bureau’s statement months ago that the pandemic had made it necessary to ask for more time to complete the count. And census experts have said that shortening the time frame would wreak havoc with efforts to reach the very hardest-to-count households that have long been flagged as most likely to be missed in this year’s tally, including undocumented immigrants. In addition to directing reapportionment of congressional seats, census counts determine federal funding for states and schools within those states. (from The New York Times, 8/4/20)

Resources from our Sponsors...

PASA is grateful for the ongoing support of our Sponsors at all levels. Although PASA does not promote or endorse any product or service offered by our sponsors, we are pleased to share information they offer that may be helpful to school leaders, particularly concerning return-to-school issues. Over the past three weeks, several of our sponsors offered free webinars and other unique opportunities to assist PASA members in planning for the next school year. A recording of several of these webinars is available on the PASA website.

On the PASA Calendar...

Sept. 7........PASA office closed
Sept.10.......Board of Governors meeting
Sept. 15......Professional Development Committee meeting
Sept. 16......PASA Webinar: Combating Hatred