In Budget & Finance News...

The Cost of In-Person Education – U.S. public schools are stockpiling masks, hand sanitizer and plexiglass shields, racking up bills that could top $100 billion to protect children who study in actual classrooms this fall or help them learn from home. The Dallas Independent School District, which is scheduled to open Sept. 8, has already spent $20 million on those items and protective equipment, and estimates a $50 million cost to install home internet for all students so they can log in from home. Factor in costs such as hazard pay, and its total pandemic-protection tab may surpass $200 million. Michael Hinojosa, superintendent of the fifth-largest urban district, says it’s especially challenging because of conflicting advice from politicians and health experts. “We deal with people’s two most prized possessions: their money and their kids,” Hinojosa said. “And they expect us to have answers. But when we keep getting mixed messages and different information we have to make different decisions.” Read the rest of the story: “Schools Face Billions in Bills to Shield U.S. Kids from Pandemic” (from bloomberg.com, 8/7/20).

Coronavirus Resources & Guidance...

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, DOH, CDC and USDE, and other important updates from the state and federal levels.

Return-to-School Issues...

State Recommendations: Cases of COVID-19 in Schools – Last week the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Health released recommendations to Pre-K to 12 schools for use in consultation with public health staff when making decisions related to school procedures following a case of COVID-19 in a school. The recommendations were released to address school leaders’ need for additional guidance in responding to COVID-19 cases in a school setting.

When a case of COVID-19 is identified in a school setting, public health staff from DOH or the County or Municipal Health Department (CMHD) will work with school administrators to provide guidance and advice related to cleaning and disinfecting, contact tracing and quarantine recommendations, and closing certain areas of the school or the entire school building if necessary. When an entire school is recommended to close, lengths of closure time will vary by level of community transmission and number of cases. This allows public health staff the necessary time to complete case investigations and contact tracing, and to provide schools with other appropriate public health advice like cleaning and disinfecting.

The recommendations include an action chart, communications information and a webinar outlining several scenarios to provide additional clarification. In addition, because a significant and/or widespread outbreak may require moving to a more remote-based instructional model more quickly, the DOH will provide proactive consultative assistance to school entities should such an outbreak occur.

Legislation on High School Sports – Last week several House Republicans held a press conference to announce their intention to introduce legislation (HB 2787) that would allow school districts to make their own decisions regarding fall sports and grant students the option to ask school districts for an additional year in school. The lawmakers indicated the bill would be in response to Gov. Wolf’s recent recommendation that competitive athletics not commence until January. During the press conference, Rep. Mike Reese (Westmoreland) said that school boards and PIAA members know students, administrators, schools and communities the most so they should be empowered to make their own decisions. Rep. Jesse Topper (R-Bedford) stated that it should be up to local school officials how to best mitigate the spread of the virus and said that, if a family or student feels they did not obtain an acceptable education experience last spring, they have the right to ask the school district for an extra year at that grade level, which is what his legislation will allow. Rep. Kerry Benninghoff (Centre) stated that legislators will remain committed to listening to the voices of Pennsylvania families and returning to normalcy as
quickly as possible. Other lawmakers who participated in the event included Seth Grove (York), Thomas Sankey (Clearfield), Cris Dush (Jefferson), Torren Ecker (Adams), Dawn Keefer (York), Eric Davanzo (Westmoreland), and Jim Rigby (Cambria).

**Dr. Fauci on a Return-to-School** – School districts developing their plans for reopening for the new academic year should find ways to offer as many outdoor activities as possible, from classes to recess and lunchtime, the nation’s top infectious disease expert recommended in an online discussion Thursday. Dr. Anthony Fauci, who heads the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, also suggested in his Facebook Live chat with Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo that, on school buses, windows should remain open and students wear their masks as much as possible. “Get as much outdoors as you can. If you look at the superspreader events that have occurred, they’re almost always inside,” he said, citing major outbreaks at nursing homes, meatpacking warehouses, prisons and weddings and other social events. (from Education Week, 8/14/20).

**Penn State Liability Waiver Form** – In the face of criticism from students, faculty, and legal experts, Pennsylvania State University said last Thursday it will reverse course and provide an alternate legal agreement students must sign regarding the coronavirus before returning to campus. The original agreement required students to “assume any and all risk” of COVID-19, which some said amounted to a liability waiver. Penn State, with an enrollment nearing 100,000, plans to hold half of its fall semester classes with at least some in-person instruction. One day after Spotlight PA and the Daily Collegian published stories about the agreement — noting it was “on the more extreme end” of what other colleges and universities were requiring — Penn State said it would provide an updated option. Read the rest of the story: “Penn State Reverses Course, Plans to Provide Modified COVID-19 Agreement for Students” (from Spotlight PA, 8/13/20).

**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. The Senate is scheduled to return to the Capital on September 8 and the House on September 15.

**Committee Schedule** – The House and Senate continue committee meetings and hearings this summer, most of them coronavirus-related. A House Democratic Policy Committee scheduled for tomorrow (August 18) and focused on cyber charter school funding was canceled.

**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 National News…**

**Ruling on Title IX** – A federal judge in New York refused to halt a new rule on responding to sexual harassment and assault in schools that is set to take effect Friday. The regulations in question, issued by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos May 6, set out the rules for how K-12 schools, colleges, and universities must respond to reports of sexual harassment and assault under Title IX, the federal law that prohibits discrimination in education on the basis of sex. In an August 9 order, U.S. District Judge John G. Koeltl refused to grant a preliminary injunction, which would have halted the rule's implementation while he heard arguments in the case, brought by school boards for the state of New York and New York City against DeVos and the U.S. Department of Education. The rule hasn't cleared all hurdles, though. A request for a preliminary injunction is pending in a similar case brought by 17 states in the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. And the rule faces another lawsuit brought by the ACLU and survivors’ advocacy groups. (from Education Week, 8/10/20)

**On the Census** – A critical part of the 2020 U.S. Census starts Tuesday, when workers nationwide will visit
households that haven't responded to the survey online or by mail. But child advocacy groups have warned that plans to abbreviate this "nonresponse followup" phase threaten to jeopardize the response rate and the accuracy of the data. And that's a big deal for schools because that population count is used to allocate billions of dollars in federal funding for programs like the National School Lunch Program, Title I, and Head Start. The most undercounted population in the 2010 Census were children under the age of 5, a crucial age group for schools. Children ages 5-9 were the second most undercounted group. "The burdens of a census undercount would be felt for the next decade and would harm our nation's children" warned ChildTrends, one of a host of research and advocacy groups that have sounded the alarm about the census schedule. "Congress and the Census Bureau have a responsibility to ensure a fair and accurate count to prevent this damage." Read the rest of the story: “Schools Rely on the Census. A Rushed Count Threatens Its Accuracy, Groups Warn” (from Education Week, 8/10/20).

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