**Guidance, Reports and Resources…**

**Stay Granted on Event Capacity Ruling** –

* CDC Guidance: New guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gives a framework for school-based testing for COVID-19, detailing who should be tested first and how such screening should be incorporated into schools’ overall strategies for controlling the spread of the virus. It suggests schools prioritize symptomatic individuals and those who’ve had close contact with those who may be ill with the virus. In a departure from previous CDC guidance, the document also discusses how schools in areas with higher risk of transmission may test broader pools of students and staff as a surveillance tool to monitor the effectiveness of mitigation efforts. Officials may want to prioritize testing strategies for schools in high-risk areas, and with large populations of students from disproportionately affected racial and ethnic groups or who lack sufficient access to testing. Read the rest of the story: “CDC Offers Cautions, Guidance for Schools’ COVID-19 Testing Strategies” (from Education Week, 10/14/20).

* Rapid Tests: School leaders around the country hope that a federal shipment of easy-to-use, rapid test kits will help them stop the coronavirus from spreading in their buildings—and will keep students and staff members who may otherwise have to quarantine in their classrooms. Some state leaders have hailed the tests as a “game changer” for schools. But, while the tests can help reduce the risk of transmitting the virus within a building, they can’t eliminate it entirely, epidemiologists warn. States and school districts need clear guidance about how to incorporate testing into their plans for tracing and isolating cases of COVID-19, and they need to continue practices such as mask wearing and social distancing to drive down the chances of transmission between asymptomatic individuals, those experts said. Read the rest of the story: “Why Rapid Coronavirus Tests in Schools May Not Be the ‘Game Changer’ Some Officials Hope For” (from Education Week, 10/9/20).

**Reporting Cases** – About a month into the school year, some public health officials and experts say the coronavirus does not appear to be spreading inside local K-12 schools that have reopened in Pennsylvania. But it’s unclear how many students or school staff have contracted the virus. Pennsylvania health officials aren’t specifying cases associated with schools — unlike New Jersey, where the state has a public dashboard announcing school outbreaks. County health departments, which are conducting contact tracing, haven’t identified which schools have cases. There’s tremendous variation in how states, counties, and districts across the United States report COVID inside schools. It ranges from virtually no information to districts providing daily, publicly accessible case counts. “Generally, this is a hodge-podgey mess,” said Emily Oster, an economist, Brown University professor, and cofounder of COVID Explained, a database of resources that includes a national COVID-19 School Response Dashboard. Read the rest of the story: “How Are Coronavirus Cases in Schools Being Reported? ‘It’s a Hodge-Podgey Mess.’” (from The Philadelphia Inquirer, 10/10/20).

**Mask Distribution** – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is providing up to 125 million cloth face masks to states and territories for distribution to schools this fall, with over 4 million slated for distribution in Pennsylvania. The emphasis of the distribution is students who are low-income (or otherwise with high needs) and schools providing in-person instruction. Masks are being allocated according to the share of students from low-income families in each state. The cloth face masks are being distributed in two shipments, with the first shipped in September.

**Internet Access** – The vast majority of school district leaders and principals say at least some of their students still don’t have sufficient internet access at home for remote learning. And most educators believe the U.S. government should be providing more funding to ensure that’s no longer the case. Two recent surveys reflect strong convictions among educators that the level of home internet access in the communities they serve continues to be inadequate. With millions of students learning from home as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the urgency to resolve those issues remains very high. Read the rest of the story: “Many Students Still Lack Home Internet. Here’s How Big the Problem Is.” (from Education Week, 10/14/20).
Coronavirus 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.

Racism and Equity Resources – PASA has compiled and posted a list of resources to assist school leaders and educators to facilitate conversations and initiatives addressing racism and inequity in schools and communities. Click here for the list.

Resources from PASA 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. Several of our sponsors have offered free webinars and other unique opportunities and resources to assist PASA members in planning for the school year. A recording of several of these webinars and a list of additional FREE resources and information is available on the PASA website.

Budget, Finance & Funding News…

Negotiations on a Federal Aid Package – (from AASA) In early October 5 President Trump stated that he would end negotiations for bipartisan COVID-19 Economic Relief package until after the election. This was met with skepticism and outright disavowal by many in his own party, who saw it as harming their chances on Election Day. President Trump changed course during the week of October 5, calling for Congress to pass relief for small businesses and airlines and to send stimulus checks to individuals. However, at this point it is unclear whether schools will be included in this next “skinny” package, or if it will be passed soon.

In Legislative News…

Session Schedule – Both the House and Senate are scheduled to be in session three days this week, the final session days before the General Election.

Bills That May Be Considered This Week –

* HB 703: School Director Email Addresses; in the Senate. The bill amends the School Code to require school districts to establish an e-mail address for each school director and post them on the school district’s publicly accessible Internet website (in a location and manner that are easily visible and accessible to the public) for use by members of the public, school district staff and students to communicate with individual school directors regarding matters of school district governance. PASA does not oppose the bill.

* HB 1342: Vision Screening; in the House. The bill creates prekindergarten vision screenings, and also modifies the current school vision screening schedule by eliminating annual screenings for students after 5th grade, instead requiring them every two years. As amended earlier, the bill changes the applicability to school years beginning after the regulations are promulgated and requires a school entity to provide resources to aid parents if they have not been able to get their annual eye exam after a failed screening. The Department of Health would develop informational resources for schools to share with parents. An amendment will be added to the bill to give schools the option of continuing annual visions screenings for students after 5th grade.

* SB 1216: Certification Flexibility. As originally introduced, the bill would amend the School Code to provide temporary certification flexibility for up to one year (expiring June 30, 2021). But SB 1216 was amended and passed by the House with several provisions PASA opposes. One would grant to parents the option of opting their children out of the Keystones or PSSA without any specific reason and require the school entity to inform parents that they would have that option. Another amendment would require school entities to inform any parents, staff, volunteers or contractors in a building or on the same school property as a positive COVID case, and require the school to provide affected students with educational support.

Concerning the opt-out provision, there is a concern about the impact on the percentage of assessment participation. In addition, the opt-outs also could include many students who ordinarily would do well on the assessments, thus further skewing assessment data. PASA also is concerned about the 24-hour COVID test notification requirement, considering that different county departments of health define “positive” as anything from
an actual test (many of which have a high false-positive rate) to a presumption of positive if someone appears to be showing symptoms. PASA believes reporting a “positive” COVID tests within 24 hours to parents and staff just is not workable, and that any reporting mandate should provide a longer time to ensure that a test is indeed positive.

**Committee Schedule**

**Tuesday, Oct. 20**

*Senate Communications & Technology Committee*
9:00 AM – Room 1, North Office Building
*Informational meeting regarding broadband roundtable discussion*

**In State News**

**Updates to the Future Ready Index** – Last Friday the PA Department of Education updated certain data elements on the [Future Ready PA Index](https://www.pde.pa.gov), the public-facing dashboard for comprehensive information on student and school success. “While a number of measures were impacted this year by mandated school closures and the suspension of statewide assessments, other key indicators have been updated and will serve as a useful tool for families, parents and school communities,” said Acting Secretary of Education Noe Ortega.

Data sets not affected by the extended school closures include: District Fast Facts, School Fast Facts and English Language Proficiency; these indicators will display school year 2019-20 data. Regular Attendance, Graduation Rate and Postsecondary Transition to School, Military and Work are considered lagging indicators, meaning data is collected at least one year prior to the reporting year. The attendance and graduation indicators will display 2018-19 data and the postsecondary transition indicator will display 2017-18 data.

The following indicators will remain unchanged, displaying 2018-19 data: PSSA, Keystone Exams, and other standardized tests; Rigorous Courses of Study; Career Standards Benchmark; and Industry-based Learning.

See the [PDE website](https://www.pde.pa.gov) for more information about this year’s data.

**More Proposed Cyber Charter Schools** – As thousands of new students flock to online education during a historically difficult academic year, state officials are being asked to grant charters to two new cyber charter schools. The Allentown-based Executive Action Charter School and Harrisburg-based Virtual Preparatory Academy aim to open their doors next year and enroll a combined 3,100 students by 2025, according to charter applications they submitted to the Department of Education last month. The schools first must receive approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which is the sole authorizer of charters for cyber schools in the state. Pennsylvania hasn’t granted a new cyber charter since 2012. And while it accepts cyber charter applications annually until Oct. 1, this is the first time since 2015 that it’s been asked to consider more than one in a single year. Read the rest of the story: “State To Consider Two New Cyber Charter Schools Amidst Enrollment Boom” (from The Pennsylvania Capital-Star, 10/14/20).

**In National News**

**Free Meals for Children** – (from AASA) On October 9, 2020, The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that it would extend flexibilities to allow free meals to continue to be available to all children throughout the entire 2020-2021 school year. Specifically, USDA's move will enable school districts to continue to leverage the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) to provide no-cost meals to all children, through June 30, 2021. Additionally, the move will permit districts to serve meals outside of the typically required group settings and meal times, waive meal pattern requirements, as necessary, and allow parents and guardians to pick-up meals for their children through June 30, 2021. AASA has engaged in this advocacy effort since the beginning of the pandemic and was proud to secure this victory for superintendents and other school nutrition leaders. More details on this extension are accessible by clicking [here](https://www.pde.pa.gov).

**The U.S. Census and the Supreme Court**

* Ending the Census Early: The Supreme Court last Tuesday ruled that the Trump administration can end census
field operations early, in a blow to efforts to make sure minorities and hard-to-enumerate communities are properly counted in the crucial once-a-decade tally. The decision was not a total loss for plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging the administration’s decision to end the count early. They managed to get nearly two extra weeks of counting people as the case made its way through the courts. However, the ruling increased the chances of the Trump administration retaining control of the process that decides how many congressional seats each state gets—and by extension how much voting power each state has. Read the rest of the story: “Supreme Court Halts Census in Latest Twist of 2020 Count” (from Education Week, 10/14/20).

* Excluding Undocumented Immigrants: In a case with potential implications for education, the U.S. Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear arguments in a case about whether President Donald Trump may order that undocumented immigrants be excluded from final 2020 census figures that will be used to reapportion congressional districts. Lower court judges who ruled on the case said the outcome of the dispute could affect the overall accuracy of the census and how funds are allocated to schools. The high court is expected to hear the case on November 30. (from Education Week, 11/16/20)

On the PASA Calendar...

Oct. 19........Women’s Caucus Virtual Networking Session
Oct. 21........PASA Webinar: Leading Students in Poverty to Success
Nov. 6..........PASA Summit for Asst. Supts. & Supervisors (virtual)
Nov. 12.......Board of Governors’ meeting (virtual)