Guidance, Reports and Resources…

**CDC Guidance and Social Distancing in Schools** – There’s no reset button on COVID-19 exposure. That’s the concern underlying new changes to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s definitions and guidance on social distancing during the pandemic, which will likely mean changes in some schools’ approach to preventing or tracing coronavirus outbreaks and significantly more students being identified for quarantine. The CDC now defines a "close contact" of someone with COVID-19 as anyone who was within six feet of someone infected for a total of 15 minutes over the course of 24 hours. For example, if a student came into contact with a sick classmate three times during a school day, for five minutes each time, he would be asked to stay home and isolate himself for 14 days, while checking for fever, coughing, and other symptoms of COVID-19. Students and adults in schools would need to go into quarantine if they had close contact from two days before the infected person showed symptoms (or within two days of being tested, if the person had no symptoms) until the infected person started quarantine. Read the rest of the story: “CDC Clarifies ‘15-Minute Rule’ for Social Distancing” (from Education Week, 10/22/20).

**COVID-Related Education Trends** – When the pandemic is over, there will be COVID-19-related practices many school administrators will happily like to see vanish and never return, such as mask wearing and social distancing. But there are some new or refined activities that — while forced upon the education world due to COVID-19 — should have staying power because they have the potential to improve student outcomes and school operations for the long term, some administrators predict. They are: remote learning bridging emergency closures, creativity increasing school model flexibility, and parent-school-community connections growing. Read the rest of the story: “3 COVID-19 Education Trends Set to Persist Post-Pandemic” (from educationdive.com, 10/20/20).

**Broadband Access Report** – The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to ignore the nation’s digital divide, which has exacerbated deep inequities in every community across the United States. For many school districts across the country, reliance on remote (mostly digital) instruction has continued into the fall. But remote learning requires digital technologies—access to broadband internet and one-to-one (1:1) computer devices— that an estimated 13.5 million school-age children (ages 5-17) lack. This digital divide threatens to widen pre-existing inequities and the opportunity to learn; putting the nation’s most underserved school-aged children at risk. In a report issued last week using Census data from the American Community Survey (ACS), Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA) estimates that one quarter of all school-aged children live in households without broadband access or a web-enabled device such as a computer or tablet. The report includes a summary of the findings, detailed tables on student and teacher access to digital technology across states, state maps of county-level estimates of broadband access for school-aged children, and state profiles with specific data for each state.

**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…
State Budget – Months after passing a partial budget that avoided some hard decisions, Pennsylvania’s Legislature and governor face a deadline at the end of November to finish the job and plug a multibillion-dollar deficit. The partially funded budget that Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf signed in May was incomplete by design. It was approved amid uncertainty about the scale of federal coronavirus support and about the pandemic’s effect on state revenues and costs. Five months later, the $25.8 billion deal that funded many governmental functions and programs is expiring on Nov. 30, which is also the last day of the two-year legislative session. There is little more certainty now about where funding for the budget gap, estimated to be more than $5 billion, will come from. Read the rest of the story: “Deadline Looms to Finish State Budget” (from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 10/17/20).

In Legislative News…

Session Schedule – Both the House and Senate are now in recess until after the General Election. Right now, both are scheduled for only one session day in November 10, but that likely will change, as work on the remainder of the state budget (Dec. 1 – June 30) still needs to be completed.

Last Week’s Bill Action – The House and Senate considered numerous bills last week. One bill that did not move was SB 1216. The bill, initially introduced in the Senate to provide certification flexibility during the pandemic, had passed the Senate but then was amended in the House to include language concerning student transportation, assessments, parental assessment opt-outs and school reporting of positive COVID cases. PASA opposed several of those amendments. (See the Oct. 19 Education Update for details.) The Senate now has three options: agree to the House amendments, further amend the bill and send it back to the House, or do nothing with the bill. Last week the chamber declined to consider the House-amended bill, thus putting off any action on SB 1216 until after the election.

Education bills that did see action last week include:

* **HB 703**: School Director Email Addresses; passed by the Senate unanimously and sent to the governor. 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 did not oppose the bill.

* **HB 1342**: Vision Screening; passed by the House unanimously and sent to the governor. 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 vision screenings for students after 5th grade.

* **SB 530**: Sexual Assault in Schools; passed by the House unanimously and sent to the governor. The bill would require a student who is convicted or adjudicated delinquent of sexual assault to be expelled, transferred to another building or transferred to another program apart from the victim if they are enrolled in the same K-12 school district. Parents or guardians who register their student in a school district would be required to confirm whether the student previous or currently is expelled for this offense and provide information relative to the name of the school and term of expulsion. The bill also requires the Safe Schools Advocate in the Philadelphia SD to monitor district compliance with the bill’s provisions. As amended in the Senate, the bill would prohibit including the student within a pool of school applicants for admission to the school (applies to charter schools).

* **SB 835**: Funding for Broadband Expansion; amended and re-referred to the House Appropriations Committee. The bill would dedicate state funding to address unserved rural areas of the Commonwealth by establishing a grant program to extend deployment of facilities already providing broadband service, limiting funding to entities who have demonstrated the ability to construct and administer, requiring it to be used in unserved areas only, and necessitating 20-percent of project costs come from their own funds.
SB 1252: Volunteer Program; passed by the Senate unanimously. The bill amends the School Code to establish the Retired Volunteer Educator Tutor Program. SB 1252 grants to intermediate units the authority to set up the program, clarifies that districts within the I.U. are not required to participate, clarifies “school entity” to include charter schools and C/T schools, and allows for remote tutoring.

In State News…

Distance Learning Series – Last week PDE announced a Distance Learning Series in collaboration with the Penn State Study Council and Penn State World Campus. The series takes a systems approach to building and refining a comprehensive distance learning pathway in local education agencies (LEAs). People are encouraged to sign up for the series in teams of five that include LEA level administrators, special education directors, curriculum coordinators, and educators. You may also engage in each webinar as a standalone experience depending on where an LEA is along the continuum of building and refining their distance learning system. Each webinar will highlight and release a distance learning tool for LEAs. Follow the flyer link to register for the series as a team or register for each individual presentations. Registration by close of business on October 28, 2020, is encouraged. The first presentation of the series "A Systems Model for Distance Education: Planning for Tomorrow" will be from 10 - 11:00 am, Thursday, October 29, 2020.

On the PASA Calendar…

Nov. 6........PASA Summit for Asst. Supts. & Supervisors (virtual)
Nov. 12.......Board of Governors’ meeting (virtual)
Nov. 16.......Women’s Caucus Virtual Networking Session (6-7 p.m.)
Nov. 16-17....New Superintendents’ Academy Part 2