Guidance, Reports and Resources…

**Survey: Social-Emotional Learning in the COVID Era** – District leaders quickly came to recognize the need to address students’ myriad social-emotional learning challenges during the chaos of the COVID era, almost from the time in-person classes were halted in the spring. A newly published *EdWeek Market Brief* special report sheds light on the specific social-emotional learning needs districts face during the ongoing upheaval—and the help they want from the private sector. The report includes a nationally representative survey of 700 district administrators and school principals. One of the questions put to them was: “In which areas do you believe you will need support from SEL programs/product providers as your school district moves to reopen?” The biggest district needs squarely reflect the COVID era: 60 percent of those surveyed said that creating a positive learning environment amid social-distancing is a priority. Read the rest of the story: “**School Districts’ Most Pressing Social-Emotional Learning Needs**” (from *Education Week*, 10/26/20).

**Survey: Leading Conversations about Race and Equity** – Although nearly 90% of school superintendents said conversations about race and equity are either extremely or very important, only 21% said they were “very well prepared” for that responsibility, according to preliminary findings from AASA, The School Superintendents Association’s 2020 Decennial Study. The study’s survey results show urban and suburban superintendents rated race and equity conversations of greater importance than rural superintendents. Among Black superintendents, 65.8% reported conversations about race were extremely important, compared to 58.6% of Hispanic/Latinx respondents and 36.6% of White respondents, according to study’s lead editor Chris Tienken. Read the rest of the story: “**Most Superintendents Say They’re Not ‘Very Well Prepared’ to Lead Race, Equity Conversations**” (from *Education Dive*, 10/26/20).

**Children without Education** – As many as three million children in the U.S. haven’t received any education since their schools shuttered in March—a sobering new estimate of the havoc the coronavirus pandemic is wreaking on the country’s most vulnerable students. “The consequences for these students’ education and well-being are not marginal concerns: They are an emergency,” researchers at Bellwether Education Partners warned in a new report. “The long-term consequences of this crisis are difficult to estimate without seeming hyperbolic.” Given how difficult reliable information on student learning has been to collect during the pandemic, researchers estimated the total number of students experiencing the worst consequences of school closures and the shift to distance learning by identifying groups of students most at risk and then calculating a likely percentage of those groups not in school, based on media reports and available data. Read the rest of the story: “**As Many As 3 Million Children Have Gone Without Education Since March: Estimate**” (from *US News*, 10/21/20).

**PASA Resources** – PASA’s [web page](#) concerning the Coronavirus and Pandemic Preparation includes links to information about COVID-related issues, along with updated guidance from the PDE, CDC and USDE, and other important updates from the state and federal levels. In addition, 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. R Zero, a PASA Platinum Sponsor, is offering “**Hospital-Grade Disinfection: Protect Students and Staff in COVID-19 and Beyond**,” a 30-minute webinar, on both Nov. 10 (10 a.m.) and Nov. 12 (noon). [Click here](#) to register. In addition, other PASA 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…
**Cyber Charter Funding Costs** – According to the PA Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), the statewide cyber charter school enrollment has increased by roughly 24,000 students in 2020-21, and, as a result, school districts likely will pay about $475 million more in charter school tuition this school year than last year, further straining budgets already stretched thin by the pandemic.

“The financial implications of this cyber charter school enrollment increase are staggering,” PASBO’s press release stated. "School districts could expect to pay an additional $350 million more in cyber charter tuition alone during this current school year due to the increased enrollment. That massive sum is on top of the overall charter school tuition increase that occurs annually due to the calculation itself.

“While the extent of the financial challenges caused by the cyber charter enrollment increase are unique in size and scope to each school district, it is something that is impacting school districts across the commonwealth.”

PASBO also noted the impact on this cost for school districts. “As school districts continue to navigate the many health, safety, educational and financial challenges of operating in a pandemic, the $475 million increase in charter school tuition adds insult to injury, effectively zeroing out most of the federal funds provided to schools under the CARES Act,” PASBO said. “On top of that, for many school districts, this charter school cost increase exceeds the amount that their Act 1 Index rate can raise in property taxes.”

As are other education associations, PASBO is calling for both short and long-term relief from this exponentially growing mandated cost. “In the short-term, to mitigate the impact of $350 million increase in cyber charter tuition this year, PASBO urges policymakers to devote any additional future federal funds to school districts to cover the cost increases due to the cyber charter enrollment growth,” the press release stated. “In the long-term, comprehensive charter school funding reform is essential, and until there is a change to the underlying policy—a policy that currently promotes a growth of hundreds of millions of dollars each year even when there is not significant enrollment growth—school districts, students and taxpayers will continue to pay the price.”

Click here for more information on the PASBO findings.

**School Safety Grants** – The School Safety and Security Committee (SSSC) within the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) last week announced it has approved the release of $49.8 million to address additional COVID-19-related health and safety needs for school districts. Districts will be receiving additional information about the application process directly from PCCD. As part of the passage of Act 30 of 2020, a total of $49.8 million in federal ESSER funding was transferred to PCCD from the PA Department of Education to be distributed to school districts to support COVID-19 Disaster Emergency School Health and Safety Grants. Awards are to be made to all school districts per the formula distribution included in Act 30. Eligible uses for the funding include the purchase of cleaning and sanitizing products; training and professional development of staff on sanitization and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases; equipment purchases; modifying existing areas to support appropriate social distancing of students and staff; providing mental health services and supports; purchasing educational technology for distance learning; and other health and safety programs, items or services necessary to address the COVID-19 disaster emergency.

**The Election and COVID Aid** – It’ll be no surprise if Election Day is the turning point in coronavirus relief negotiations. But what exactly might happen after all the votes are counted and there are definitive winners and losers? Without those results, it’s impossible to say definitively, of course. But based on conversations with a few veteran Washington education lobbyists, it’s possible to sketch out scenarios that hinge on control of the presidency and the Senate, with the House all but certain to remain under Democratic control. Those scenarios range from the passage of a relatively small relief package not long after the election, to a big aid deal that includes money for longstanding federal education grants—but doesn’t get completed until well into 2021. Read the rest of the story: “How Election Day Could Alter COVID-19 Aid Talks for Education” (from Education Week, 10/23/20).

**Underfunding and the Equity Gap** –

* Report on Equity in PA: Pennsylvania’s public school children are being shortchanged by $4.6 billion — and those in the poorest school districts, who have fallen the furthest behind, are owed the most, according to a new analysis commissioned by advocates seeking to overhaul the state’s education funding system. The conclusions, based on state data over the past decade, depict widening gaps in education spending between affluent and poor communities — and divides in academic performance. At the same time, students in the poorest districts have the
lowest standardized test scores and highest dropout rates, while students from low-income families in Pennsylvania’s highest-spending districts perform better on state measures and graduate from college at higher rates. The funding gap may be even greater, the report says — noting rising costs for schools, and more rigorous state standards for students. The analysis, prepared for a Commonwealth Court judge, is the latest salvo in a year’s long legal battle to address school funding inequities, one that could intensify as the case moves toward trial. Read the rest of the story: “Pa. Schools Need an Additional $4.6 Billion to Close Education Gaps, New Analysis Finds” (from Spotlight PA, 10/27/20).

* From the PA House Democratic Appropriations Committee: Last week Democratic staff for the House Appropriations Committee released several documents related to the inequities in Pennsylvania’s school funding system. “The COVID-19 pandemic exposed glaring disparities in educational resources between school districts,” the briefing stated. “These disparities are a statewide problem, but we can easily see them within the counties we live and sometimes, in cases like mine, between the school districts we represent. The table displays some figures by school district that I have found lead to productive conversations with constituents and stakeholders. These metrics are components of the bipartisan basic education fair funding formula. They showcase the vast differences in the ability to raise revenue at the local level, the relative local tax burden, and the resulting spending disparities. The solution to these inequities is to increase state funding for all school districts and prioritize new funding for historically disadvantaged school districts.”

**In Legislative News…**

**Session Schedule** – This is election week, and both the House and Senate are in recess. At this point, they are scheduled to be in session only next Tuesday (Nov. 10), but that may change.

**Last Week's Bill Action** –

* **HB 703**: School Director Email Addresses; signed by the Governor as Act 84 of 2020. The act 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.

**In National News…**

**Federal Charter Grants for Religious Schools** – The law is clear: In order to be eligible for federal charter grants, charter schools must not be “affiliated with a sectarian school or religious institution.” But Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said last week that she will no longer enforce this prohibition. Religious organizations should feel free to apply for federal money to open charter schools, she said, and a recent Supreme Court ruling is on her side. “Prohibiting religiously affiliated public charter schools is unconstitutional,” DeVos said at a forum in Kentucky. “The Department of Education in the Charter School Program will not discriminate and will allow for and welcome religiously affiliated applicants.” It’s not clear that DeVos’s move will prompt immediate changes in who tries to start charter schools, and it could be reversed by a Biden administration if President Trump loses reelection next week. But it amounts to the first shot fired in what’s likely to be a lengthy legal battle over charter schools and religion in the wake of two recent Supreme Court decisions. Read the rest of the story: “DeVos Will Let Religious Groups Apply for Charter Grants, Opening Up New Legal Battlefront” (from chalkbeat.org, 10/29/20).

**Federal Funds for Education Jobs** – Amid stalled coronavirus relief negotiations, leading Democrats on a congressional education committee unveiled a proposal this week they say could safeguard up to 3.9 million education jobs threatened by the pandemic and address the effects of interrupted learning. Alarm bells are ringing in school districts across the country about the state of their budgets in an economy hamstrung by the coronavirus. Some states have already made cuts to K-12 funding, but analysts say many of the worst effects of the pandemics on education funding are still to come. Education groups have been warning Congress about this issue for months. To address these concerns, the Save Education Jobs Act would provide up to $261 billion to preserve teaching and other school jobs over a 10-year period. All states could draw on the money for at least six years. The funding would remain available after that six-year period until the national unemployment rate falls to 5.5 percent or below (for perspective, unemployment now stands at 7.9 percent). Individual states with high unemployment rates could receive additional aid after that time frame. States would have to agree to maintain their
own education funding at certain levels in order to tap the relief. And at least 90 percent of the money would have to go to school personnel salaries and benefits. Read the rest of the story: “Lawmakers Push Plan to Protect School Jobs From Pandemic Cuts” (from Education Week, 10/28/20).

Across the Nation…

Maine: Vouchers for Religious Schools – The 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston upheld a Maine law Thursday that excludes religious schools from a publicly funded high school tuition program. Parents challenging the law and their attorneys at the Institute for Justice in Arlington, Virginia, say they plan to appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, according to a written statement. Under the statute, school districts in Maine that don’t have their own secondary schools can pay tuition for students to attend other public or private schools, but not religious schools. Three families in Orrington, Glenburn and Palermo sued the state in 2018 to get that tuition reimbursement for their children at Bangor Christian School and Temple Academy in Waterville. “The U.S. Constitution does not allow the government to discriminate against religious educational options,” said Arif Panju, senior attorney at the institute. “The state of Maine has done so for 40 years, and we will ask the U.S. Supreme Court to finally put an end to it.” (from news reports, 10/30/20)

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
Nov. 19……..AASA/PASA National Superintendent Certification Program