Post-Election News…

**Rivera on Biden/Harris USDE Agency Review Team** – Former Pennsylvania Department of Education Secretary Pedro Rivera has been tapped to serve on the agency review team for the U.S. Department of Education. The review teams are comprised of experts who will help to ensure a smooth transition of power to the Biden Administration.

“Pedro Rivera was an excellent secretary of education for Pennsylvania and he is a tremendous choice by President-elect Biden to help prepare the education efforts of the next administration,” said Gov. Wolf. “Pedro’s leadership was critical to rebuilding strong relationships to local school communities and improving the quality of education in our state. Under Pedro Rivera's leadership, Pennsylvania reduced the overreliance on standardized testing, adopted a landmark basic education funding formula, created the innovative Future Ready PA Index and more. I am proud that Pedro served in my cabinet and I look forward to his efforts to help set the values and priorities of the incoming administration.”

After serving as Pennsylvania secretary of education since Gov. Wolf took office in 2015, Rivera became president of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology on Oct. 1. He was previously the superintendent of the School District of Lancaster.

Guidance, Reports and Resources…

**Call for a Return to Remote Learning** – The head of the state’s teachers union is asking school districts in select counties to return to remote learning full-time due to an increase in COVID-19 cases across Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) president Rich Askey is encouraging school districts to follow the state’s own guidelines for education, which calls for fully remote learning in any county that is experiencing a substantial level of community spread, essentially 100 or more cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 residents. As of Nov. 11, 38 counties fit that bill. “The state departments of Health and Education developed these guidelines based on good science and what the infection rates are in a school’s community,” Askey said in a press release. “We must follow these guidelines to the letter. It’s the best way for us to slow the spread of this virus and keep our students, staff, and their families safe.” He acknowledged that shifting from in-person to remote learning isn’t ideal. “As educators and support professionals, every PSEA member wants to be at school with their students, providing them with the best possible education,” he said. “Our concern is that in-person instruction in communities with a substantial spread of the virus will put the health and safety of everyone in those school communities at risk. That is why it is so critically important for every district to follow the state guidelines.”

**PIAA: Considerations for Winter Sports** – The PIAA has released “Return to Competition – Individual Sports,” specifically to address considerations for winter sports. Click here for the guidance.

**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. 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.
IFO Fiscal Analysis – Late last month the Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) released a Revenue and Economic Update: Fiscal Year 2020-21. According to the IFO, the data suggest that the state will face unique short- and long-term challenges due to the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key findings of the analysis are as follows:

* Employment Data: The latest employment data for CY 2020 reveal rapid labor market improvement in May, June and July, but much more modest gains in August and September. Overall, the IFO assumes foregone labor income of $25.5 billion for CY 2020. By comparison, the unemployment compensation and economic impact payments inject $42.3 billion into the state economy, which more than offsets lost labor income.

* Job Recovery: The forecast assumes modest job recovery for the remainder of the calendar year. Lower-wage jobs have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. In addition, for September, U.S. data show that four times as many women than men left the labor force. For CY 2021, the forecast assumes that only 100,000 additional payroll jobs (average for entire year) will be recouped. If that occurs, then the level of payroll employment will remain below the CY 2019 level by 350,000 jobs, and policymakers should anticipate significant challenges in regards to long-term unemployment.

* Updated Revenue Estimate: Based on actual revenue collections through October 2020 and the current economic outlook, the IFO’s updated revenue estimate for FY 2020-21 is $36.52 billion, $650 million above the IFO’s official estimate. However, consumer expenditures are expected to fall in the coming months, with less federal support flowing to households in 2020 Q4. In addition, the updated FY 2020-21 personal income tax (PIT) estimate is $15.35 billion and reflects a $30 million reduction from the IFO’s official estimate.

* Ongoing Impact of the Pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact withholding and non-withholding collections through the remainder of FY 2020-21, due to continued unemployment, lower wage growth and reduced non-withheld earnings (e.g., net profits, capital gains, dividends, interest and rental payments).

IFO Demographic Analysis – Another recent report issued by the IFO concerns changing demographics in Pennsylvania and the potential impact on the commonwealth. The analysis reflects previous findings that show a lower birth rate and an aging population, both of which will impact both state and local revenues, as well as education spending and student numbers. Specific findings include the following:

* The total population was nearly flat from 2015 to 2020 and is projected to contract slightly in the near term (-0.1 percent per annum) and long term (-0.2 percent per annum).

* The school age cohort (age 0 to 19) has declined 0.6 percent per annum from 2015 to 2020 and is projected to contract at the same rate in the near term, but slightly more in the long term (0.7 percent per annum).

* The working-age cohort (age 20 to 64) declined 0.5 percent per annum from 2015 to 2020 and is projected to contract by 0.7 percent per annum in the near term and 0.6 percent per annum in the long term. In 2025, this group includes mostly Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Millennials (born between 1981 and 1997) and a portion of Generation Z (born between 1998 and 2015). If labor force participation rates do not increase, then this trend will constrain economic and revenue growth in the future.

* The retiree cohort (age 65 to 79) increased 3.3 percent per annum from 2015 to 2020 and is projected to expand by 2.6 percent per annum in the near term and then expand 0.6 percent per annum in the long term. In 2025, this group includes most of the Baby Boom Generation (born 1946 to 1964). The increase in this age cohort and the next age cohort implies strong demand for healthcare and long-term care services moving forward.

* The elderly cohort (age 80+) increased 0.2 percent per annum from 2015 to 2020 and is projected to expand by 1.9 percent per annum in the near term and 3.9 percent per annum in the long term. In 2025, this group mostly includes the Silent Generation (born between 1926 and 1945) and a very small number of individuals from the Greatest Generation (born between 1905 and 1925).

* The population in rural areas across the commonwealth continues to decrease. With the exception of the southeast, which continues to see a population increase, all other areas are experiencing a slight or rapid population decrease. In addition, rural, sparsely-populated counties have much higher shares of residents age 65 and older, with the second fastest growth of 65+ residents in the southwest.

“Over time, there will be relatively fewer working-age residents to support the needs of rapidly expanding retiree and elderly populations,” the report concludes. “Stated differently, the burden of support will fall on a smaller group of taxpayers. The actual contraction of the working-age cohort, which remits the great majority of state taxes, suggests that real per capita tax levels for that age group must increase to keep pace with the anticipated increase in demand for healthcare and other services.”
In Legislative News...

**Session Schedule** – Both the House and Senate are scheduled to be in session three days this week, which is not much time to finalize the remainder of the state budget or any other legislation.

**Legislative Leadership Elections** – With the election, there also were some changes in House and Senate leadership for the 2021-22, and one in particular was very significant: In 2021-22, two of the four caucuses will be led by female legislators – and that has never happened.

* House Republican Caucus: The House Republican leadership team largely remains the same. Bryan Cutler (Lancaster) said he will be running again for Speaker of the House. Returning leaders include Kerry Benninghoff (Centre) as Majority Leader, Donna Oberlander (Clairion) as Majority Whip, Stan Saylor (York) as Majority Appropriations Chair, Kurt Masser (Northumberland) as Majority Caucus Administrator, and Martin Causer (McKean) as Majority Policy Committee Chairman. Mike Reese (Westmoreland) moves from Majority Caucus Secretary to Majority Caucus Chair, replacing Marcy Toepel (Montgomery) who is retiring, and Martina White (Philadelphia) moves to Majority Caucus Secretary. Republicans picked up a few more seats with the election, so expect to see continuing (if not strengthening) of the Republican agenda in that chamber. We anticipate that Curt Sonney (Erie) will continue as House Education Chairman, although committee assignments have not yet been made in either the House or Senate (generally something done in January).

* House Democratic Caucus: Unlike the Republican Caucus, this caucus had a significant leadership shakeup, as current Minority Leader Frank Dermody (Allegheny/Westmoreland) lost re-election to the House. The caucus elected a female legislator, Joanna McClinton (Philadelphia/Delaware), as Minority Leader. She is the first woman and first woman of color to be chosen for the position. (With the Nov. 3 election, more than one-third of the caucus are women.) Other new leaders include Dan Miller (Allegheny) as Caucus Chair, Tina Davis (Bucks) as Caucus Secretary, and Mike Schlossberg (Lehigh) as Caucus Administrator. Continuing in their current positions are Jordan Harris (Philadelphia) as Minority Whip and Matt Bradford (Montgomery) as Appropriations Chair. James Roebuck (Philadelphia), long-time minority chair of the House Education Committee, lost his House seat in the election, so there will be a new minority chairman of that committee.

* Senate Republican Caucus: There also was a shakeup in this caucus. Everyone assumed Jake Corman (Centre) would move up from Majority Leader to President Pro-Tempore, as Joe Scarnati is retiring – and he did. What was unexpected is the caucus vote to move a female legislator, Kim Ward (Westmoreland), up from Caucus Administrator into the position of Majority Leader, the first time a woman has moved into that position in Pennsylvania history. Those continuing in their leadership posts include Pat Browne (Lehigh) as Majority Appropriations Chairman, John Gordner (Columbia) as Majority Whip, Bob Mensch (Montgomery) as Majority Caucus Chairman, and Ryan Aument (Lancaster) as Majority Caucus Secretary. With changes in top caucus leadership, there likely will be changes in staff as well, which means changing dynamics. We work closely with legislative staff, so that means developing relationships with those who will move into key positions.

* Senate Democratic Caucus: The caucus last week did not select their leadership but likely will this week. What is known is that there will be a new minority chair of the House Education Committee, as Andy Dinniman (Chester) is retiring.

**Status of SB 1216 (Teacher Certification)** – As originally introduced, **SB 1216** 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 then passed by the House and sent back to the Senate, where it awaits consideration, possibly this week.

One amendment the House added to the bill would allow the PDE to seek a federal waiver from testing requirements this year, and PASA supports this. If PDE applies for a waiver, even if the Biden administration ok’s it, state law requires testing, so the language in SB 1216 would basically give PDE permission to secure a waiver with legislative approval. So it is important to get that provision in the bill and get it across the finish line now.

However, **PASA opposes several of the House amendments**. 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. Other amendments 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, require districts to provide transportation to nonpublic students even if the district is doing all-virtual education, and require
districts 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.

PASA also is concerned about the transportation language, as there is growing concern about continuing (and increasing) COVID cases and whether districts logistically would even be able to (or should) put groups of children on buses.

There is concern in the Senate also about these amendments, which means the bill likely will be amended again to remove some of those provisions – which means SB 1216 would need to go back to the House and get final consideration there. The concern is the limited number of days left for this bill to cross the finish line. The House must end session after Nov. 30, which doesn’t leave much time to finalize SB 1216.

PASA and the PA Principals’ Association sent a letter to the Senate this week to urge support for and opposition to the various provisions in the bill – and get SB 1216 to the governor this month. It is important to get it done now, as there likely will be no more School Code bills considered or approved before next spring.

In National News…

Secretary DeVos’s Legacy – The power to polarize may be the most lasting piece of DeVos’ legacy. DeVos has made an impact at the helm of the education department. She axed Obama-era guidelines for schools that provided protections for transgender students, among other changes, arguing for a more limited role for the federal government; oversaw a sweeping re-write of the procedures for handling sexual harassment in K-12 schools; and limited the scope of civil rights investigations, the consequences of which might take years to fully see. But DeVos did not succeed at encouraging substantial numbers of students to opt out of public schools with new private school voucher programs — her central policy goal. Read the rest of the story: “Betsy DeVos Is on Her Way Out. What Will Her Legacy Be?” (from chalkbeat.org, 11/9/20).

On the PASA Calendar…

Nov. 16……..Women’s Caucus virtual networking session (6-7 p.m.)
Nov. 16-17…..New Superintendents’ Academy Part 2
Nov. 18……..Fall Webinar Series #3: Implicit Bias in Schools
Nov. 19……..National Supt. Certification Program (virtual session)
Nov. 26-27…..PASA office closed