



Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators
Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania Schools

Education Update

May 13, 2019

In Funding & Finance News...

Op-Ed: Need for More State Support – The Allentown School District avoided financial collapse this school year by taking out a \$10 million loan to fill a \$7.6 million budgetary hole. But Allentown, the region's largest school district, still faces an \$18 million deficit for 2019-20. While Allentown searches for a way to close that gap by a June 30 deadline, neighboring Bethlehem Area School District, the Valley's second largest, is poised to pass its first budget in 25 years with no tax increase. The district faced a \$7 million deficit in February, but through savings and increases in revenue, that has dwindled to \$1.6 million. That hole will be closed with borrowing from a reserve account. The reasons for the differences? Administrative turnover, borrowing and the need to rely on property taxes. Concerning the latter, Allentown, with a 90 percent poverty rate, is located within a city, where the median house value is \$124,000, while Bethlehem, with a 60 percent poverty rate, extends beyond city limits, with a median house value of \$168,000 but with median values in outlying areas between \$283,700 and \$243,200. *Read the rest of the story:* [“Why Allentown and Bethlehem’s School Budgets Are Night and Day”](#) (from *The Morning Call*, 5/8/19).

In Safety & Security News...

Legislation on School Safety – Barely a day after America's latest school shooting, a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives introduced a package of bills that they say could help stop future acts of violence before they happen. The measures call for more school nurses; increased firearms and CPR training for school police and security officers; efforts to get school guidance counselors, social workers, and psychologists to meet national standards; improved reporting and data collection for students who attempt or commit suicide on school grounds; and a mandatory mental health and anti-bullying curriculum for students. At a Capitol news conference Wednesday, backers of the proposed “Beyond Safe Schools” package say the bills are designed to build on legislative authorization last year of a \$60 million grant fund that districts can use to enhance physical safety and security in school buildings. *Read the rest of the story:* [“‘We Need To Stop It Before It Happens:’ Bipartisan House Coalition Rolls Out New School Safety Measures”](#) (from *The Capital Star*, 5/8/19).

In Legislative News...

Legislative Schedule – Last week was a busy one for both chambers of the General Assembly. The House used most of their time to discuss an EITC expansion bill. (See below.) However, we expect this week to be a little quieter as the House is the only chamber in session. After this week, neither the House nor the Senate will return until June 3, when the push to finalize a state budget plan begins.

In Last Week’s Legislative Action –

* **[HB 227](#): School Board Elections; approved by the Senate Labor & Industry Committee and will now go to the full Senate for consideration.** The bill clarifies that all candidates for the office of school director will be required to submit 10 signatures for nomination. The bill went through the legislative process rather quickly and should be headed to the governor in early June.

* **[HB 283](#): Right-to-Know Fees; approved by the House State Government Committee.** The bill amends the Right-to-Know Law to allow a public entity to charge an additional standard fee for a request for records that will be used for a commercial purpose. As amended, the bill would provide an exclusion for journalists, non-commercial scientific institutions, and nonprofit educational institutions.

* **[HB 305](#): Broadband Access; approved by the House State Government Committee.** The bill directs the

Department of General Services (DGS) to conduct an inventory of all state department, agency, commission or institution owned communication towers, poles, buildings, and facilities to leverage existing state-owned assets for the provisioning of high speed broad-band internet to unserved and underserved areas. **The bill was approved unanimously.**

* **[HB 800](#): EITC Expansion; passed by the House, 111-85, largely along party lines.** The bill would increase the amount of tax credits available under the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program by \$100 million to \$210 million in 2019-20 and also would provide for an annual increase of 10%. The prime sponsor of HB 800 is Rep. Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny), Speaker of the House, who indicates in the [sponsorship memo](#) circulated for the bill that the intention of increasing funds available for private school tuition is to “strengthen school choice opportunities.” [Click here](#) to see how lawmakers voted on this bill. **PASA opposes increases to tax-credit programs that will reduce available revenues needed to fund public schools. PASA also questions the lack of accountability in the distribution and use of EITC funding.**

* **[HB 1031](#), [HB 1196](#) and [HB 1210](#): Outdate Provisions in the School Code; passed by the House unanimously.** The bills would repeal and remove provisions from the School Code that are outdated or inconsistent with current practice, regulation or law.

* **[SB 89](#): C/T References; passed by the Senate unanimously.** The bill updates the Public School Code to replace “vocational-technical schools” with “career and technical schools.”

* **[SB 91](#): Career Information; approved by the Senate Labor & Industry Committee.** The bill requires The PA Department of Labor & Industry to collect data on emerging and projected future employment sectors in the Commonwealth and annually disseminate that information to all educational institutions, who will in turn be required to provide the information to those individuals responsible for vocational and educational guidance for planning and developing career education or vocational programs.

***[SB 115](#): CPR Curriculum; passed by the House unanimously.** The bill, passed by the Senate 45-0, requires PDE and the Department of Health to develop a model curriculum and guidelines for CPR instruction for students in grades 9-12. The bill will now go to the governor. **PASA supports this bill as it allows for optional instruction.**

* **[SB 621](#): Act 44 Amendments; amended and approved by the Senate Education Committee.** The bill makes technical and definition amendments to Act 44 to clarify that school security personnel (including those provided by third-party vendors and those would be considered “independent contractors”) and who have fulfilled training requirements have the authority to carry a firearm. The bill further clarifies that sheriffs and sheriff deputies who comply with all training requirements may be used as school security officers and would be able to carry a firearm in schools.

This Week's Committee Calendar –

Monday, May 13

House Education Committee to consider four bills amending Pennsylvania's **Charter School Law**. All four bills, which are a priority for House Republican leaders, were introduced last week but none of them concern either funding/tuition issues or issues related to evidence of student success. **No** hearings will be held on the bills. Rather, the bills will be approved in committee and then head to the House floor for consideration. [Click here](#) to read **PASA's position on these bills**. The four bills are:

* **[HB 355](#): Charter School Ethical Requirements.** The bill amends the Charter School Law as follows: prohibits paid media advertisement by a public school entity to refer to tuition or transportation cost as free but rather stipulate that tuition or transportation costs are covered by taxpayer dollars; makes certain definitions to further identify administrative roles and responsibilities; expands the definition of “cyber charter school” to include a school that utilizes electronic or digital books for a significant portion of its curriculum; stipulates ethical obligations of charter school board members and administrators in line with requirements for school boards and administrators in traditional public school entities; stipulates membership on charter school boards and operating procedures; requires annual independent financial audits; places limits on fund balances. **PASA**

supports this bill, as it outlines significant ethics requirements that will hold charter school administrators and board of trustee members accountable for ethical conduct similar to traditional public school administrators and school board members.

* **HB 356: Right of First Refusal.** The bill amends the Charter School Law to grant to charter school the right of first refusal for purchase or lease of unused school district buildings, requires school districts and higher education institutions to make their facilities available to cyber charter school students for the purposes of standardized testing, and requires charter schools to cover or remove religious objects and symbols if using a sectarian facility. ***PASA opposes this bill, which is in direct conflict with open, market-based practices and will potentially lower the value of school district property during the sale process. Furthermore, lifting the cap on enrollments would allow a charter school entity to add one or more new charter schools within the same district that originally approved the charter – with NO additional approval.***

* **HB 357: Charter School Applications.** The bill provides for transfer of records; moves the charter school application deadline from November 15 to October 1; requires the PDE to develop a standard charter school application and identifies its contents; prohibits local school boards to require additional information with an application, develop their own applications or require additional information beyond the standard application form; grants solely to the General Assembly authority to make changes to the standard application forms upon recommendation by the PDE; stipulates the length of an initial charter for no less than three years and not more than five years; allows for charter renewal in five-year increments, with the renewal application provided to the local school board by December 1 of the final year of the charter and requiring a vote on the renewal application within 90 days of receipt; grants to the charter school appeal board the final decision concerning renewal; stipulates a process for amending a charter and timelines for school board action; outlines requirements and processes for enrollment concerning a standard application waiting lists (giving preferences to those living in the district where the charter school is located); prohibits school districts from referring to their online instruction program as a “cyber charter school” unless the district applies to be so recognized and meets all procedures and requirements for application; stipulates the term of an initial cyber charter as between three to five years and requires the PDE to act on a five-year renewal application within 90 days of receipt. ***PASA opposes this bill, which limits what information school district boards can review in charter school applications, essentially usurping the locally elected school board’s right to conduct its due diligence. The bill also restricts the authority of the PDE in developing and amending an application form, granting that authority instead to the General Assembly, and allows for the charter application to be amended just prior to its consider by a school board.***

* **HB 358: Dual Enrollment and Charter Schools.** The bill would allow charter school entities to enter into dual enrollment agreements with institutions of higher education. ***PASA is very concerned about this bill. Although we are not opposed to giving all students options to engage in college-level courses while still in high school, we are concerned that this provision may allow charter schools in high tuition areas of the state to profit from dual enrollment agreements, when the tuition cost for higher education is lower than the tuition charged to the district for a charter-enrolled student.***

Tuesday, May 14

House Human Services Committee to consider:

* **HB 672: Mental Health Treatment Age of Consent.** The bill clarifies age of consent authority related to inpatient mental health treatment by granting to parents and guardians of minors less than 18 the authority to consent to such treatment of the minor child and not require the minor’s consent to such treatment. The bill also clarifies that a minor between ages 14-18 may consent to their own voluntary inpatient health treatment without the consent of a parent or guardian.

In State News...

State Board Resolutions – Last week the State Board of Education unanimously approved resolutions supporting Gov. Wolf’s proposals to lower the mandatory school-start age from 8 to 6 and raise the compulsory attendance age from 17 to 18. The Legislature still must approve the proposals for them to take effect. The Wolf administration says lowering the mandatory start age from 8 to 6 would affect about 3,300 children. Officials say

only one other state allows parents to keep children out of school until age 8, a policy Pennsylvania adopted in the late 19th century. Pennsylvania's minimum age to drop out of school is currently 17. The administration says nearly 14,000 students drop out without graduating every year in Pennsylvania. (from the Associated Press, 5/9/19)

Across the Nation...

Kentucky: Bible Classes in Public Schools – Scenes of Bible classes in public school could become increasingly common across the United States if other states follow Kentucky's lead in passing legislation that encourages high schools to teach the Bible. Activists on the religious right, through their legislative effort Project Blitz, drafted a law that encourages Bible classes in public schools and persuaded at least 10 state legislatures to introduce versions of it this year. Georgia and Arkansas recently passed bills that are awaiting their governors' signatures. Among the powerful fans of these public-school Bible classes: President Trump. "Numerous states introducing Bible Literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the Bible," Trump tweeted in January. "Starting to make a turn back? Great!" "It's part of an effort to establish this sort of narrow Christian agenda as the norm for our country, the government-sanctioned and -supported norm," said Rachel Laser, the president and chief executive of the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. *Read the rest of the story: ["A Conservative Christian Group Is Pushing Bible Classes in Public School Nationwide – and It's Working"](#)* (from *The Washington Post*, 5/8/19).

Louisiana: Impact of Vouchers – The Louisiana scholarship voucher program, which now encompasses approximately 7,000 students annually, was signed into law by Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal at a Baton Rouge school in April 2012. The program was lauded by Betsy DeVos' American Federation for Children and other school choice advocates. Jindal lauded the program as one that would ensure that every Louisiana child would get a great education. Years after the program started, however, the Louisiana Scholarship Program has not lived up to those words. Our joint investigation found children going from public or charter schools to lower-performing scholarship schools, often with little oversight. The same year as Jindal's 2013 speech, an analysis of state education data showed sixty percent of the schools graded in the scholarship system received a failing score. Last school year, ninety-two percent of the schools graded in the scholarship system received a D or F grade. No school in the system received an A or B grade. Five studies over the past four years concluded overall students' academic performance did not improve in voucher schools. The studies also found being in a voucher program hurt a student's math scores. *Read the rest of the story: ["The Cost of Choice: Louisiana's Voucher Program Costs Millions More to Send Children to Lower-Performing Schools"](#)* (from Fox 8/WVUE, 5/7/19).

Oregon: Teacher Protests for More School Funding – Tens of thousands of teachers across Oregon walked off the job last Wednesday to demand more money for schools, holding signs and wearing red shirts that have become synonymous with a nationwide movement pushing lawmakers to better fund education. Schools around the state, including Oregon's largest district, Portland Public Schools, closed for at least part of the day. Most offered day care and free lunch programs. An estimated 25,000 people massed in a downtown Portland park for a rally before marching through the city. The mix of teachers, parents and students wore red to support the "Red for Ed" campaign that's taken hold nationwide and chanted that slogan. It was one of many protests statewide that called on lawmakers to expand school funding in Oregon, which has some of the largest class sizes and lowest graduation rates in the United States. *Read the rest of the story: ["Oregon Teachers Walk Out in Red to Press for School Funding"](#)* (from the AP, 5/8/19).

On the Calendar...

May 13-15	Women's Caucus Conference (Hershey)
May 16	PLUS Caucus meeting (virtual)
May 17	Technology Committee meeting (virtual)
May 27	PASA Office closed
May 28	Women's Caucus Board meeting (virtual)