



**Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators**  
*Proud Leadership for Pennsylvania Schools*

## Education Update January 11, 2021

### Budget, Finance & Funding News...

**December Revenues**— According to the PA Department of Revenue, Pennsylvania collected \$3.7 billion in General Fund revenue in December, which was \$465.8 million, or 14.5 percent, more than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$18.5 billion, which is \$467.1 million, or 2.6 percent, above estimate.

**2021-22 State Budget** – Gov. Wolf will release his proposed state budget for FY 2021-22 on Tuesday, Feb. 2. The House and Senate will begin appropriations hearings on the proposal beginning March 15.

### Guidance, Reports and Resources...

**Update to Instructional Model Recommendations** – The Pennsylvania departments of Health (DOH) and Education (PDE) last week provided school administrators and school boards with an [FAQ update](#) and [updates to instructional model recommendations](#) concerning which instructional models they should consider using based on the changing levels of community transmission of COVID-19 in their counties.

Until now, the county designations aligned to three recommended instructional models: fully in-person, blended/hybrid, and fully remote. Starting January 25, the departments are providing a second recommendation for elementary schools in “substantial level” counties. In addition to remote learning, now there is an option for blended/hybrid learning for elementary students. Fully remote learning remains recommended for middle and high schools in the “substantial level” counties. K-12 schools may also consider bringing back targeted student populations for in-person instruction, regardless of what general instructional model they are utilizing.

These updated recommendations are intended to help schools begin the process of safely returning as many students as possible to in-person instruction during the 2020-21 academic year.

“The commitment our educational leaders have shown towards mitigation efforts is noteworthy and helps us support returning many of our youngest and most vulnerable students to some level of in-person instruction,” said Acting Secretary Noe Ortega. “We must remember that a safe return to in-person instruction will look different across every school and county depending on a variety of local factors.” (from a press release)

**Update on COVID in PA** – The Pennsylvania Department of Health today confirmed on Saturday that there were 10,045 additional positive cases of COVID-19, bringing the statewide total to 713,310. As of January 9, there were 5,318 individuals hospitalized with COVID-19, near double the peak in the spring. Of that number, 1,092 patients are in the intensive care unit with COVID-19. Most of the patients hospitalized are ages 65 or older, and most of the deaths have occurred in patients 65 or older. The trend in the 14-day moving average number of hospitalized patients per day has increased by nearly 5,200 since the end of September.

**The Future of Remote Learning** – Many teachers hate it. Millions of parents find it exhausting. A growing body of evidence suggests it has contributed to students falling significantly behind. Regardless, livestreamed remote instruction is set to remain a significant part of K-12 education, long after the coronavirus pandemic is finally under control. For America’s schools, COVID-19 isn’t just a public health crisis. It’s also a budget crisis and a mental health crisis, an academic crisis and a racial-justice crisis. No one yet knows the full severity and duration of the resulting challenges. But a dozen experts consulted by Education Week—district leaders and pediatricians, economists and parents, ed-tech entrepreneurs and policy researchers—see a confluence of forces that will likely fuel continued demand for remote teaching. *Read the rest of the story:* [“No Going Back’ From Remote and Hybrid Learning, Districts Say”](#) (from *Education Week*, 1/7/21).

**School Reopenings and COVID Rates** – Opening school buildings doesn’t increase the spread of COVID-19 in places where cases or hospitalizations from the virus are rare, according to two new studies. Reopening schools in areas with higher caseloads, though, does spread the virus, one found, while the other

couldn't rule out that possibility. It remains unclear exactly at what point school reopening becomes more risky. The papers are the most rigorous efforts yet to understand the link between schools and COVID spread in the U.S. It's research that could guide school officials and health officials grappling with whether to reopen or keep open school buildings. But there aren't simple answers for places with higher numbers, at a moment when some counties are seeing COVID cases peak. *Read the rest of the story: "[Do Schools Spread COVID? It May Depend on How Bad Things Already Are around Them](#)"* (from *chalkbeat.org*, 1/4/21).

**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](#).

## In Legislative News...

**Contentious Start of Session** – In what should have been a routine and ceremonious swearing in of members of the 2021-22 PA Senate last week Tuesday devolved into a partisan shouting match, with Republicans voting to oust Lt. Gov. Fetterman from his role as presiding officer in that chamber for the proceedings. Sen. President Pro Tempore Jake Corman (R-Centre) then took over that role and announced he would refuse to seat Jim Brewster (D-Allegheny/Westmoreland), whose 69-vote reelection victory in November has been state-certified. His challenger in that race, GOP Nicole Zicarelli, has been challenging the results of the election, even though she has lost appeals in several courts concerning ballots and is now appealing to federal courts and has submitted a formal election contest petition with the Senate. After more raucous shouting in the chamber, with Democratic senators insisting that Corman's actions were unconstitutional and constituted an illegal power grab, Sen. Brewster advised his colleagues that he would step back to allow the rest of the senators to be sworn in. As a result, for now the seat remains unfilled, with Republicans unwilling to recognize Brewster as the winner of that seat until the court case is resolved.

In contrast, the House session day was calm, with Rep. Bryan Cutler (R-Lancaster) unanimously elected House Speaker and all members sworn in without dissent. As did the Senate, the House adopted operating rules that required members to wear masks on the floor and in committee meetings. However, several members did not follow those orders.

**Leadership Announcements** – Last week House Republicans and Democrats announced committee chair appointments for the new session. Rep. Curt Sonney (R-Erie) will return as majority chair of the Education Committee, while Mark Longietti (D-Mercer) will take over the position of minority chair of the committee, replacing longtime minority chair Jim Roebuck (Philadelphia), who lost his reelection bid in the spring primary.

Also last week Senate President Pro Tempore Jake Corman (R-Centre) announced that Elder Vogel (R-Lawrence) has been appointed to the new position of Deputy President Pro Tempore for the Senate Republican Caucus.

**Session Update** – Due to the violence and events in Washington, D.C. last Wednesday, the Pennsylvania Capitol building was closed on Thursday, Jan. 6. Members and staff were directed to telework instead of reporting to the building. The Senate is in recess the week. The House is in session three days this week, with most business concerning committee organization. Both chambers will be in recess next week and are scheduled to return to session the week of January 25.

## In National News...

**Secretary of Education Resignation** – U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos submitted her resignation last

Thursday, just a day after a violent insurrection in Washington that attempted to stop Congress' certification of President-elect Joe Biden's victory. Her departure from President Donald Trump's administration followed a string of resignations from the upper ranks of the executive branch following the violence at the U.S. Capitol, including another Cabinet official, Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao. In a [letter to Trump](#) announcing her resignation, effective Jan. 8, DeVos told the president that he was culpable for the violence at the Capitol, telling him that "there is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation" and called his actions "the inflection point for me." (from *Education Week*, 1/7/21)

**Title IX Memo** – The U.S. Department of Education has released an internal memorandum from its acting general counsel that stakes out the view that "sex" in Title IX refers only to biological sex, and that schools do not violate the law by refusing to allow transgender students to use restrooms and locker rooms or participate in athletics consistent with their gender identity. The Education Department released the memo publicly less than two weeks before President Donald Trump's term in office ends. The memo is not a formal regulation and it seems likely the incoming administration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. could withdraw it and proffer its own views of the scope of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which bars sex discrimination in federally funded schools. The views in the memo are contrary to several recent federal court rulings that have interpreted Title IX to protect transgender students and to allow them to use restrooms or participate in athletics consistent with their gender identity. (from *Education Week*, 1/10/21)

**New Guidance: USDA Meal Waivers & FRPL** – (from AASA) Due to the impact of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nationwide waivers – which support students' access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19 through June 30, 2021 – last week, the U.S. Dept. of Education (USED) released a document that provides Local Education Agencies (LEA) and State Education Agencies (SEA) with [guidance](#) on how to carry out the data collection activities for the education programs associated with the federal school meals programs. Specifically, this guidance pertains to the National School Lunch Program data collection activities associated with Title I, Part A – Improving Basic Programs; Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Instruction; and Title V, Part B – Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS) for the 2021-2022 school year.

For many LEAs that have chosen to participate in USDA's federal meals program waivers, complete NSLP data collected through household applications may not be available from school year 2020-2021. As such, USED's fact sheet outlines options for SEAs and LEAs to implement their ESEA programs without complete NSLP data. The good news here is that according to the guidance, using data from the 2019-2020 school year is allowable for all circumstances, which means that ED has essentially created a hold harmless provision for school districts and states that have seen a decline in free and reduced-price Lunch forms.

**New Senate Education Committee Chair** – Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who helped write the Every Student Succeeds Act, is set to become the chairwoman of the Senate education committee following Democrats' victory in two U.S. Senate runoff elections in Georgia last Tuesday. Murray, a former preschool teacher, has served as the ranking Democrat on the committee since 2015. She will replace Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., who retired at the end of the last Congress and worked with Murray on writing ESSA as the committee chair. As the leader of the committee, Murray will have oversight over a variety of education issues, although her top priority will be addressing policy issues related to the coronavirus pandemic's impact on schools. In an interview with *Education Week* last month in which she said she planned on becoming the committee chairwoman if Democrats took control of the Senate, Murray stressed the need for schools to administer assessments to help determine students' academic needs as a result of school closures and other disruptions. (from *Education Week*, 1/7/21)

**National Priorities for School Principals** – Fund schools to pre-recession levels to cope with the local economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Increase funding for literacy programs. Support policies and programs that will diversify the principalship and the larger educator workforce. Fund school mental health programs and technology infrastructure to close the digital divide that was laid bare during the coronavirus shutdowns. And create a standing principals' cabinet or similar federal-level forum to allow principals and school leaders to weigh in on education policies and to tap their expertise on school leadership needs and priorities. These are some of the priorities the national principals' groups have for the Biden administration, which takes office on Jan. 20, and the new Congress. [Read the rest of the story: "What Principals Want From the Incoming Biden Administration and Congress"](#) (from *Education Week*, 1/5/21).

**On the PASA Calendar...**

Jan. 13.....National Superintendent Certification Program (virtual)  
Jan. 15.....Aspiring to Leadership Workshop (virtual)  
*Jan. 18.....PASA office closed*  
Jan. 20.....Informational webinar for superintendent on liability issues  
Jan. 21-22.....New Superintendents' Academy Part 3