THE PASA Flyer

Vol. 69, NO. 1- October 2026

Uniting visionary leaders, shaping the future of public education

Inside:

Pocono Mountain Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Robison Honored as the 2027 PA Superintendent of the Year

Measles Preparedness:
PASA Calls on School Leaders to Take Proactive Steps to Prepare for Potential Measles Outbreaks

Professional Development:
When the Keynote Speaker Doesn't Make It

PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference:
PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference Inspires Collaboration, Innovation, and Purpose-Driven Leadership

From PASA's Executive Director:
From Cellphone Restrictions to Artificial Intelligence: Navigating the Next Chapter of Technology in our Schools

From the President's Pen:
Leading with Intentionality

Professional Development Calendar | Member News | State and National News | AASA Updates

Inside this issue:

4 **From the Executive Director:** From Cellphone Restrictions to Artificial Intelligence: Navigating the Next Chapter of Technology in Our Schools

8 **From the President's Pen:** Leading with Intentionality

10 **Recognized:** Pocono Mountain Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Robison Honored as the 2027 PA Superintendent of the Year

12 **A Heartfelt Thank You:** Honored to Serve

14 **Measles Preparedness:** PASA Calls on School Leaders to Take Proactive Steps to Prepare for Potential Measles Outbreaks

18 **Conference Recap:** PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference Inspires Collaboration, Innovation, and Purpose-Driven Leadership

22 **Women's Caucus:** Leading Through K-8 Reconfiguration

24 **Professional Development:** When the Keynote Speaker Doesn't Make It

34 **Innovative Teaching and Learning:** Structuring the Screen Time Conversation

38 **Writing Out Loud:** Learning from the Animal Kingdom: What the Safari Can Teach Us About Leadership and Communication

It's time to renew your PASA membership!

Your membership helps PASA advocate for school leaders while providing valuable resources, professional learning, and member benefits designed to support your success.

Highlights for 2027:

Leadership Forum Savings:
Bundle your membership renewal with registration for the 2027 PASA Leadership Forum (March 31–April 2) and secure the lowest rate available all year.

In-Dues Liability Coverage:
Members now receive professional liability insurance through PASA's partnership with Trust for Insuring Educators (TIE).

Expanded Professional Learning:
New Superintendent Impact Series sessions and Assistant Superintendents and Central Office Leaders' Summit continue to strengthen leadership capacity.

CTE Caucus:
PASA's new CTE Caucus is advancing collaboration and leadership around career-connected learning.

Additional Exclusive Member Benefits:
Enjoy discounted media subscriptions, legal support, advocacy, and more.

Click here to see our full membership benefits package.

Renew today to continue accessing the benefits, support, and opportunities PASA provides!

Click here to renew your membership.

The PASA Flyer is published monthly by the Pennslyvania Association of School Administrators.

President:
Dr. David Christopher, Superintendent
West Chester Area School District

Treasurer:
Dr. John W. Zesiger, Assistant Superintendent
Penns Valley Area School District

President-Elect/Secretary
Mrs. Lynn Fuini-Hetten, Superintendent
Salisbury Township School District

Past President:
Dr. Gennaro R. Piraino, Jr.
Franklin Regional School District

Executive Director:
Dr. Sherri L. Smith, PASA

Director of Professional Development:
Dr. Michele M. Balliet, PASA

Director of Communications:
Mr. Adam Kulikowski, PASA

PASA Members:
Please report your appointments, renewals, awards or special achievements, or that of others in your region to Adam Kulikowski at PASA either by phone (717) 540-4448, by fax (717) 540-4405, or via email at pasa@pasa-net.org. Copy deadline is the 1st of each month.

PASA
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

Superintendent Impact Series

Strengthening Leadership. Elevating Impact. Advancing Schools.

High-Impact Learning for Today's School System Leaders

The role of the superintendent has never been more complex. This six-part professional learning series equips you with the strategies, tools, and confidence to lead with vision, strengthen your district, and create lasting impact for students and communities.

- Expert-led sessions
- Practical tools & strategies
- Connect & learn with colleagues across PA
- Earn Act 45 hours

LEARN MORE. LEAD STRONGER. SAVE MORE.

REGISTER FOR ANY 3+ SESSIONS *and Save!*

Build your own learning path and receive a special bundle discount when you register for three or more sessions.

THE 6-PART SERIES

1. **Assessing the Educational Landscape and Identifying Systems and Processes**
   Examine today's challenges and opportunities, develop a shared vision, and use systems thinking, planning frameworks, and accountability strategies to drive meaningful change.

2. **Aligning Vision with Resources: Unlocking the Power of Multi-Year Budgeting**
   Lead financial conversations with confidence, align resources with student needs, communicate effectively, and plan budgets and priorities for long-term success.

3. **Integrating Operations into Your District Ecosystem**
   Align facilities, transportation, and operational systems with educational goals. Learn to plan, build, communicate, and comply while leading operational excellence.

4. **When Every Word Matters: Strategic and Effective Communication for Superintendents**
   Strengthen everyday communication and crisis response, build a full communication system, and develop messaging that builds trust and drives results.

5. **Comprehensive Planning**
   Create coherent, results-driven plans that connect vision, strategy, implementation, accountability, and continuous improvement across your district.

6. **Building Relationships for Successful Negotiations**
   Build trust, strengthen labor relations, and navigate negotiations with advanced strategies, legal insights, and collaborative solutions.

INVEST IN YOUR IMPACT.

Attend one session or build your own experience. Every session is a step toward stronger leadership and stronger schools.

- ✓ Designed for experienced and aspiring superintendents and district leaders
- ✓ Relevant. Practical. Actionable.
- ✓ Make connections that last
- ✓ Lead with greater clarity, confidence, and impact

SCAN TO LEARN MORE & REGISTER TODAY!

IN PERSON SESSIONS AT THE PASA OFFICE
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

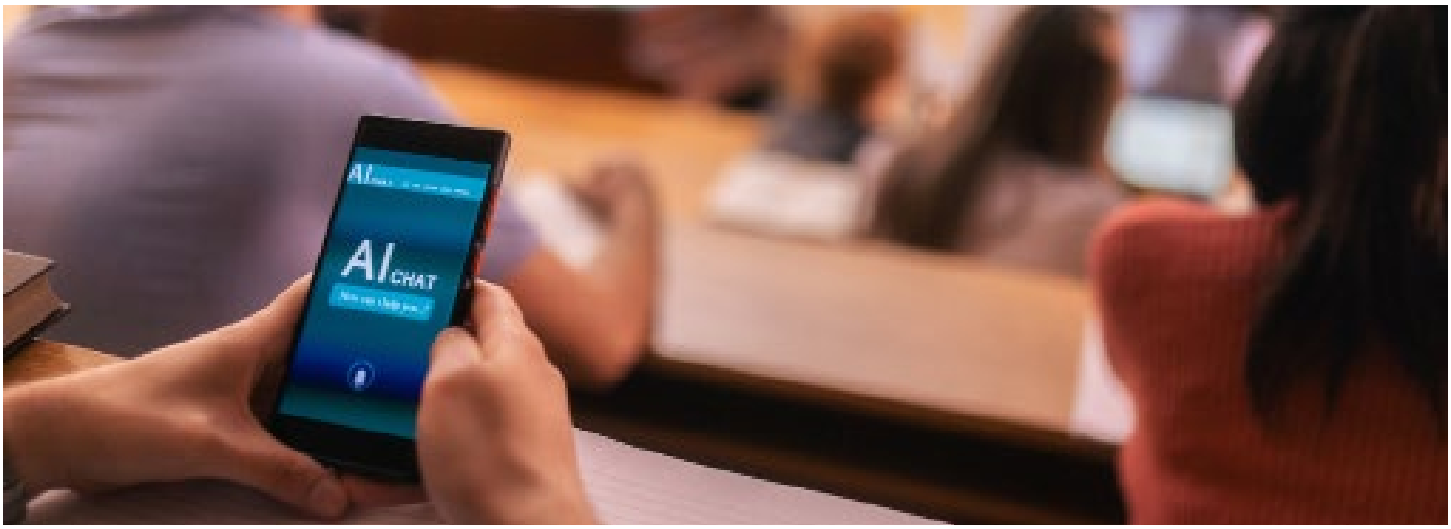
EARN ACT 45 HOURS
Each session offers Act 45 professional development hours.

Stronger Leaders. Stronger Schools. Stronger Pennsylvania.

From the Executive Director

From Cellphone Restrictions to Artificial Intelligence: Navigating the Next Chapter of Technology in Our Schools

By Dr. Sherri L. Smith
Executive Director, PASA



Over the past two decades, we have witnessed an extraordinary transformation in how technology influences teaching, learning, communication, and the daily operations of our schools. We have invested millions of dollars in devices, infrastructure, instructional software, and professional development to ensure our students are prepared for an increasingly digital world.

Today, we find ourselves at another interesting crossroad. On one hand, Pennsylvania is moving toward greater restrictions on student cellphone use during the school day. On the other, artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming nearly every aspect of our personal and professional lives, presenting opportunities and challenges that we are only beginning to understand.

In many ways, these two developments represent the same fundamental leadership question: How do we ensure that technology serves education rather than allowing technology to dictate how education operates?

Cellphones: Reclaiming the Learning Environment

With the recent passage of Senate Bill 1014 by the Pennsylvania Senate, our Commonwealth has taken another significant step toward establishing statewide expectations for student cellphone use in schools.

The legislation calls for bell-to-bell restrictions on student mobile devices, with implementation anticipated for the 2027–28 school year if enacted. For school leaders, this represents more than simply adopting another school policy. It raises important questions about school culture, student behavior, parent expectations, communication, enforcement, and the role of technology in the educational environment.

For years, educators have expressed growing concerns about the impact of smartphones and social media on student attention, engagement, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. Teachers have found themselves competing with a constant stream of notifications, messages, and digital distractions. School administrators have increasingly devoted valuable time to resolving conflicts and disciplinary situations that originate through students' online interactions.

At the same time, we recognize that cellphones have become deeply embedded in the daily routines of students and families. For many parents, the ability to communicate directly with their children throughout the school day provides a sense of connection and security. For students, their devices are often central to how they communicate, socialize, and access information.

Changing those expectations will require much more than a revised student handbook. It will also require practical planning around emergency communications, medical and disability-related accommodations, consistent enforcement, and the resources necessary to implement new procedures.

PASA CTE Caucus Building Collaboration across the Commonwealth: PASA's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Caucus is working to strengthen career and technical education across Pennsylvania by connecting school leaders, sharing best practices, and advocating for policies that support workforce readiness.
Pictured from left to right: Back row: Steve Leever, David Livengood, Mark Covelle, Mark Holtzman, and Scott Rogers.
Front row: Caucus Chair Jason Lucia, Nicole Zermick, PASA Executive

The real measure of success on the cellphone ban will be whether we create stronger learning environments where students are more engaged, more connected to one another, and better able to focus on learning.

While we are working to establish boundaries around one form of technology, another is advancing at a pace that challenges even our most forward-thinking school leaders.

Artificial intelligence is no longer a future consideration for public education. It is here, it is evolving rapidly, and it is already being used by students, teachers, administrators, and families.

Unlike the cellphone discussion, which has largely centered on reducing distractions and addressing student behavior, the AI conversation presents a much broader and more complex set of questions.

- How do we prepare students for a world in which AI will be integrated into nearly every profession?
- How do we ensure that students continue to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and independent learning skills when technology can generate answers, essays, presentations, and analyses in seconds?
- How do we support teachers in using AI to strengthen instruction without diminishing the professional judgment and personal relationships that are fundamental to effective teaching?
- How can school systems responsibly use AI to improve operational efficiency, reduce administrative burdens, and better allocate increasingly limited resources?

These are not questions that can be answered through a single policy or professional development session.

As school leaders begin developing more comprehensive approaches to artificial intelligence, I believe there are three interconnected areas that deserve particular attention.

First, student learning and readiness.

Our responsibility is not simply to determine whether students should be permitted to use AI. It is to determine how we teach them to use it appropriately, ethically, and effectively. Students will enter a workforce where AI literacy will increasingly be an expected skill. We cannot adequately prepare them for that future by ignoring the technology or relying exclusively on restrictions.

At the same time, we must protect the foundational skills that allow students to think independently, evaluate information, solve problems, communicate effectively, and distinguish credible information from misinformation.

This will require thoughtful consideration of academic integrity, assessment practices, digital citizenship, and equitable access to emerging technologies.

Second, instructional practice and professional capacity.

AI has the potential to become a valuable resource for educators. From supporting differentiated instruction and developing instructional materials to analyzing student learning patterns and reducing routine paperwork, its applications continue to expand.

But technology cannot replace the knowledge, experience,

relationships, and professional judgment of an effective teacher.

We must invest in helping educators understand both the possibilities and limitations of AI, providing meaningful professional learning and clear expectations for responsible use.

Third, school leadership and administrative operations.

Receiving less attention, but equally important, is the potential impact of AI on the business and operational functions of our school systems.

Consider the time our administrators and staff spend on scheduling, communications, data analysis, financial planning, transportation, human resources, compliance reporting, and countless other responsibilities.

AI may offer opportunities to streamline processes, improve access to information, identify trends, and allow school personnel to devote more time to the work that requires human interaction and professional expertise.

However, these opportunities come with significant responsibilities involving student and employee privacy, cybersecurity, data accuracy, transparency, vendor accountability, and appropriate human oversight.

School leaders must ensure that efficiency never comes at the expense of sound judgment, confidentiality, or public trust.

Keeping the Human Element at the Center

The newly passed cellphone legislation and the rapidly expanding use of artificial intelligence reminds us that the most important element of education has not changed.

Education remains, first and foremost, a human endeavor.

Students need meaningful relationships with teachers and peers. They need opportunities to struggle through challenging problems, develop confidence in their abilities, learn from mistakes, and discover their own interests and strengths.

Teachers need the time, resources, and professional autonomy to respond to the unique needs of the students they serve.

And school leaders need to make decisions that balance innovation with responsibility, opportunity with safeguards, and efficiency with the fundamental purpose of public education.

The cellphone discussion reminds us that not every technological advancement automatically improves the learning environment.

The AI discussion reminds us that we cannot prepare students for tomorrow by relying solely on yesterday's approaches.

Regional News:

Region 3:

The Avonworth School District Board of Directors recently announced the appointment of Joshua Weaver as the district's next Superintendent of Schools. Weaver brings more than 20 years of experience in public education to Avonworth after previously serving as the chief school leader at Grove City.

Region 3:

Amy Dellapenna was recently appointed Assistant Superintendent of McKeesport Area School District. Dellapenna, who has served the district for more than 26 years, previously held the role of Assistant to the Superintendent.

Region 24:

Octorara Area School District recently named Shawn Dutkiewicz to serve as its new Superintendent. Dutkiewicz previously held the role of Assistant Superintendent at Radnor Township School District in Delaware County. Dutkiewicz replaces Steven Leever, who left the district in July to become the new director of Career, Technical & Customized Education for the Chester County Intermediate Unit.

Please report member news to PASA at pasa@pasa-net.org. Announcements of professional vacancies across Pennsylvania and in neighboring states are posted on the PASA website at www.pasa-net.org (Click on the "Leadership Development" button and look for "Career Center.")

Over the coming months and years, Pennsylvania's school leaders will be called upon to make consequential decisions about how technology is used, managed, and integrated into our schools.

Our goal should not be to create schools with less technology or more technology. Our goal should be to create schools where technology is used with greater purpose, responsibility, and impact.

The decisions we make today will help shape not only the classrooms of tomorrow, but also how well we prepare our students to learn, work, and thrive in a world that will continue to change at an extraordinary pace.

And that is leadership work worthy of our collective attention.

PASA
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS AND CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS SUMMIT

FROM FRAMEWORK TO PRACTICE: *LEADERSHIP IN ACTION*

TWO DAYS. ONE POWERFUL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE.

BETTER TOGETHER. *Bring Your Leadership Team!*

Join PASA for two days designed for assistant superintendents, central office leaders, and district teams who are leading change, strengthening culture, and turning priorities into action.

DAY 1

LEARN IT.

BUILD THE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

in partnership with Studer Education

Explore the ***9 Pillars of Leadership Excellence through a highly interactive workshop.***

- **Lead people through change** with greater clarity and purpose
- **Build a culture of recognition** that strengthens engagement
- Create **meaningful one-on-one** conversations through effective rounding
- **Align people and priorities** around what matters most
- **Turn learning into action** with a commitment you can put to work immediately

THIS ISN'T LEADERSHIP THEORY. IT'S A FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORK YOU'RE ALREADY LEADING.

DAY 2

SEE IT.

SEE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Pennsylvania Leaders. Pennsylvania Districts. Real-World Practice.

Hear directly from Pennsylvania education leaders who are applying these leadership practices within their own districts and organizations.

THEY'LL SHARE:

- What did they try?
- How did they get people on board?
- What challenges did they encounter?
- What worked?
- What did they learn?
- What would they do differently?

Learn how PA leaders are building culture, engaging teams, leading change, improving systems, creating alignment, and moving ideas to action.

LEARN IT. → SEE IT. → LEAD IT. | *Take the learning home. Make it your impact.*

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Assistant Superintendents
- Directors & Supervisors
- Central Office Leaders
- District Leadership Team Members
- Administrators Leading Districtwide Initiatives

BETTER LEADERSHIP. STRONGER TEAMS. GREATER IMPACT. *Come as a team!*

BRING YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM AND *SAVE!*

PASA MEMBERS		NON-PASA MEMBERS	
FULL SUMMIT	TEAM RATE	FULL SUMMIT	TEAM RATE
$175	District colleagues of PASA members attend for $100 EACH!	$200	Bring a district colleague for $175 EACH!

REGISTER TODAY!

OCTOBER 14–15, 2026
HARRISBURG, PA

Earn Act 45 Hours
www.pasa-net.org

CONNECT. Build valuable relationships.
LEARN. Gain practical strategies you can use right away.
LEAD. Return to your district ready to make an impact.

LEARN IT. SEE IT. LEAD IT. *Make Your Impact.*

From the President's Pen

Leading with Intentionality

By Dr. David Christopher
Superintendent, West Chester Area
2026-27 PASA President

As I begin my term as President of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, I do so with a tremendous sense of gratitude, excitement, and humility.

Public education has been my life's work. Over the course of more than three decades as a teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent, I have had the privilege of serving alongside extraordinary educators who dedicate themselves every day to the success of students. The opportunity to serve as PASA President is an honor, and I am deeply grateful for the trust my colleagues have placed in me.

Throughout my career, I have become convinced that the most effective leadership decisions share a common characteristic: they are intentional.

In a profession increasingly driven by urgency, intentionality may be the most important leadership practice we possess.

We live and lead during a time when speed often feels like a necessity. News cycles move quickly. New initiatives, technologies, mandates, and challenges emerge with increasing frequency. School leaders are routinely asked to do more, respond faster, and solve increasingly complex problems.

In that environment, intentionality becomes one of the most important leadership practices we can embrace.

Intentionality requires us to pause before we react.

It asks us to align our decisions with our values.

It challenges us to focus not only on what we are doing, but why we are doing it.

The best educational leaders I know are intentional about relationships. They are intentional about building trust. They are intentional about communication, culture, and the systems they create to support students and staff. Most importantly, they are intentional about keeping students at the center of every decision.

Early in my career, I often equated leadership with activity. I believed effective leaders were those who moved quickly, solved problems immediately, and kept every initiative moving forward. Over time, however, I came to recognize that activity-focused leadership can become highly transactional, centered on completing tasks, managing demands, and moving from one immediate need to the next.

The leaders I most admired offered something different. They were not defined simply by what they accomplished, but by the purpose and care they brought to their interactions. They listened before responding, invested in relationships, and created space for others to contribute. They understood that leadership is not merely a series of transactions; it is a relational practice grounded in trust, clarity, and shared purpose.

What I was really observing were individuals who understood the difference between leadership and management.

Management is essential. Schools cannot function without

strong systems, effective operations, and attention to detail. But leadership requires something more.

Leadership requires purpose.

It requires a clear understanding of where we hope to go and the disciplined commitment to ensure that our actions move our organizations forward in that direction.

When our actions are intentional, we strengthen that commitment.

When our communication is intentional, we build trust.

When our relationships are intentional, we foster belonging.

When our leadership is intentional, we create the conditions that allow students and educators to flourish.

This understanding feels particularly important today. School leaders are navigating unprecedented complexity.

We balance competing priorities, respond to evolving expectations, and make decisions that affect the lives of students, families, and communities. In the midst of these demands, intentionality serves as our anchor. It keeps us focused on our purpose and reminds us that leadership is not measured by the volume of our activity, but by the impact of our actions.

Throughout the coming year, I look forward to using this column to explore issues that matter to educational leaders across Pennsylvania. Together, we will examine challenges, celebrate successes, and engage in conversations about the future of public education.

My hope is that each discussion will be guided by the same principles that should guide our work as educational leaders:

To lead thoughtfully.

To act purposefully.

And to remain intentional in our service to students, staff, and communities.

The future of public education will undoubtedly present challenges. Yet it also presents extraordinary opportunities. By remaining grounded in our values, committed to our purpose, and intentional in our leadership, we can continue to strengthen our schools and the communities we serve.

Dr. David Christopher serves as Superintendent of the West Chester Area School District and President of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA). With more than 30 years of experience in public education, he has served as a teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent and remains committed to advancing educational opportunities for all students across Pennsylvania.

Thank you to our Diamond Sponsors:

SchoolData.net
a Definable Solutions company

edmentum™

FOUNDERS Education
For Your Pursuit™

RIGHT AT SCHOOL

PLGIT
Pennsylvania Local Government Investment Trust

fueling brains

PASBO

Pocono Mountain Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Robison Honored as the 2027 PA Superintendent of the Year

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) is proud to announce Dr. Elizabeth Robison, Superintendent of the Pocono Mountain School District, as the 2027 Pennsylvania Superintendent of the Year.

This year's selection process featured an outstanding slate of candidates from school districts across the Commonwealth.

Following a comprehensive review of the nominees, the PASA Elections Committee and Board of Governors selected Robison for her demonstrated leadership in improving student outcomes, expanding opportunities, strengthening community partnerships and advancing public education.

Mrs. Lynn Fuini-Hetten, Superintendent of Salisbury Township School District, and Dr. Erin Keating, Superintendent at Scranton School District, were finalists in this year's process.

"I am truly honored and grateful to be named Superintendent of the Year. More than anything, I see this as a reflection of the wonderful people I have had the privilege of working with during my 38 years at Pocono Mountain," Dr. Robison said. "No superintendent leads alone. I am fortunate to be surrounded by a dedicated team of administrators, colleagues, teachers, and staff who bring the knowledge, compassion, commitment, and heart to our schools every day. Their willingness to collaborate, their belief in our students, and their dedication to doing what is best for children are what make our work meaningful. This honor belongs to all of us who come together each day with a shared purpose - to serve our students, support one another, and make Pocono Mountain the very best it can be."

"I am deeply grateful to lead alongside such an exceptional team and to continue this important work together, always keeping our students and their future at the heart of all that we do."

Robison has served as superintendent of Pocono Mountain since 2011 and is a 40-year educator who has dedicated much of her career to the district.

Her leadership is grounded in a commitment to student success, equity, innovation and collaboration.

One of Robison's most significant accomplishments has been leading a comprehensive redesign of secondary education to address achievement gaps and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Working collaboratively with district leaders and the school board, Robison led the transition to a renewed daily schedule while simultaneously redesigning the district's cyber program.

PMSD Cyber evolved into a comprehensive K-12 program

offering individualized learning pathways, live synchronous and asynchronous instruction, small-group instruction, co-teaching, counseling, intervention services, credit recovery and expanded opportunities for students with diverse needs.

"Dr. Robison's long-standing leadership in the Pocono Mountain school community and her contributions to public education across Pennsylvania distinguished her in a strong field of nominees for the 2027 PA Superintendent of the Year," PASA Executive Director Dr. Sherri Smith said. "She leads with purpose, passion and vision, and her commitment to students, staff and community has made a lasting impact. Through her work as superintendent and in numerous community and state leadership roles, including her service on the PASA Board of Governors, Dr. Robison exemplifies the kind of leadership that inspires others to think boldly, embrace new possibilities and help re-envision the future of public education in the Commonwealth."

Under Robison's leadership, Pocono Mountain has also expanded opportunities beyond traditional academics. Students have earned regional, state, national and international recognition in areas including STEAM, problem-solving, chess, speech and debate.

The district has strengthened programs in athletics, the arts and career-focused learning, including the development of a state-of-the-art Wellness Facility. Pocono Mountain has also been recognized as a Great Pennsylvania School, a Best Community for Music Education by the National Association of Music Merchants, and an Outstanding Visual Arts Community by the Pennsylvania Art Education Association.

Robison has emphasized partnerships that address students' academic, physical, social and emotional needs. The district works with organizations including St. Luke's University Health Network, the Pocono Mountains United Way and Communities in Schools to provide resources and support for students and families.

Robison has worked closely with the Pocono Mountains United Way for over 30 years, receiving the Spirit of Caring and Outstanding Campaign Manager awards.

Robison's influence extends beyond her district.

She serves on the PASA Board of Governors and participates in the PASA Women's Caucus.

She also serves on the boards of the PA Association of Rural and Small Schools, Lehigh Valley Health Network Board of Associates, and Monroe County Communities in Schools.

In 2024, Robison was appointed by Gov. Josh Shapiro to the Pennsylvania State Council for the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, representing school districts serving military-connected students.

Pocono Mountain was also recognized with a 2025

Keystone Award of Excellence as a Purple Star School.

Her professional contributions have earned numerous honors, including the 2026 Margaret Smith Leadership Award from the PASA Women's Caucus and distinguished alumni recognition from Marywood University, Bloomsburg University, Shippensburg University and Pottsville Area School District.

Dr. Robison will serve as the Pennsylvania finalist in the AASA National Superintendent of the Year® program, with national finalists announced in late 2026 and the national honoree recognized during AASA's National Conference on Education in February 2027 in Atlanta, Georgia.

A Heartfelt Thank You: Honored to Serve

By Dr. Elizabeth Robison
Superintendent, Pocono Mountain
2027 PA Superintendent of the Year

There are moments in life when you pause, take a breath, and realize just how many people and experiences have shaped the person you have become. Being named Pennsylvania Superintendent of the Year is one of those moments for me.

My first reaction was not to think about the award itself, but about the people who made this journey possible. After 38 years in the Pocono Mountain School District, including 15 years serving as superintendent, this district is not simply where I have worked.

It is a place that has become woven into the fabric of my life. It is where I have grown, learned, celebrated, faced challenges, built friendships, and had the privilege of watching generations of children find their way.

When I think about Pocono Mountain, I don't simply think about buildings, programs, or titles. I think about people. I think about the students who have inspired me, the educators who give everything they have to their students, the colleagues who have stood beside me through difficult days, the families who entrust us with what matters most to them, and the community that continues to believe in our schools.

I truly believe I bleed cardinal red and panther blue. And I say that with a tremendous amount of pride—not because of an award, but because of the people and the place that those colors represent.

This recognition is deeply humbling because I know that no superintendent, no educator, and no leader reaches a moment like this alone. This is a story of many people, many sacrifices, many lessons, and countless moments that have made this journey so meaningful.

And so, before I say anything else, I simply want to say: thank you.

First and foremost, to our students—this recognition belongs to you. You are the reason we come to work each morning. You are the reason we continue to ask difficult questions, find new solutions, and never stop looking for ways to do better. Every decision we make must ultimately come back to one simple question: What is best for our children?

To the incredible teachers, administrators, support staff, coaches, counselors, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, food service employees, custodians, and every member of our Pocono Mountain family—thank you. Your dedication often happens quietly and behind the scenes, but it makes an extraordinary difference in the lives of our students. I am continually inspired by the compassion, creativity, perseverance, and professionalism you bring to your work.

There are so many people throughout my career who have taught me that leadership is not about having all the answers. It is about listening, learning, surrounding yourself with good people, and being willing to grow. I have been fortunate to work alongside people who have challenged me, encouraged me, supported me, and, at times, simply reminded me that we were going to get through whatever was in front of us together.

To my colleagues, thank you for being part of that journey. The relationships we build in this profession are among its greatest gifts.

To our Board of Education, thank you for your partnership, your commitment to our students, and your willingness to work together through both opportunities and challenges.

Leading a school district is never a one-person job. It requires trust, communication, collaboration, and a shared commitment to our mission.

To our families and community partners, thank you for believing in our schools and for understanding that educating children truly is a community effort. Pocono Mountain is fortunate to have so many organizations, businesses, agencies, and individuals who step forward to support our students. Your partnership makes our schools stronger, and

I am grateful for every person who has invested their time,

resources, and heart in our children.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the educators and mentors who shaped me throughout my own journey.

Every teacher who believed in me, every administrator who challenged me, every colleague who offered advice, and every student who taught me something along the way has contributed to the leader I am today.

When you spend 40 years in education, you realize that you never stop being a student yourself. There is always someone who teaches you something. There is always another perspective to consider, another challenge to navigate, and another opportunity to become better.

And then there is my family.

To my family, thank you for understanding the demands that come with serving as a superintendent. Leadership does not always end when the workday does. There are evenings, weekends, phone calls, difficult decisions, community events, and countless moments when school has to come first.

You have shared this journey with me in ways that people may never see. You have understood the long hours, the difficult days, the celebrations, and the moments when I came home carrying the weight of something that happened at school.

Your patience, encouragement, love, and unwavering support have allowed me to give my heart to this work. Whatever success I have had has been made possible because of the love and support I have received at home.

There have been sacrifices along the way. There have been challenging days and difficult decisions. But there have also been countless moments that remind me why this profession is so special—a student who finds success, a teacher who makes a difference, a family who feels supported, or a colleague who steps forward when help is needed.

Those are the moments that stay with you.

I am also deeply grateful to the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators and my fellow superintendents and educational leaders across Pennsylvania. To be recognized among so many dedicated professionals is an honor I will never take for granted. Our work is challenging, but it is also incredibly rewarding, and I am grateful for the relationships, friendships, and professional connections that have developed throughout my career.

When I think about this recognition, I realize that the honor is really a reflection of the people who have been part of my journey. It represents the students who have inspired me, the staff members who give so much of themselves every day, the colleagues who have stood beside me, the Board members who have shared in the work, the families and community partners who support our schools, and the mentors who helped shape the educator and leader I have become.

For that, I am profoundly grateful.

This honor does not represent the end of a journey. Rather, it is a reminder of the responsibility that comes with the work we do. There is always more to learn, more to improve, more students to reach, and more opportunities to make a difference.

After 40 years, I still believe that there is no greater privilege than being an educator and no greater responsibility than serving children.

I accept this recognition with a full heart and with tremendous pride in the Pocono Mountain School District.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of my journey.

Thank you for believing in me, supporting me, challenging me, and allowing me the privilege of serving.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Dr. Elizabeth Robison
Superintendent
Pocono Mountain School District

PASA Provides School Leaders with Proactive Steps to Prepare for Potential Measles Outbreaks

By Dr. Sherri L. Smith
Executive Director, PASA

As measles cases continue to emerge across Pennsylvania, including recent cases in Chester County, PASA wanted to provide basic preparation steps and encourage all school leaders to take proactive steps to prepare their districts and schools before a confirmed case of measles occurs in your school community.

First, take note that this communication is only intended to support proactive administrative planning. Specific decisions regarding measles exposure, immunity, exclusion, and return to school should be made in consultation with the appropriate public health authorities and applicable legal requirements.

The recent experiences of school leaders in Chester County provide a valuable lesson for all of us. A single confirmed case of measles can quickly become much more than a public health concern.

It can also create significant operational challenges involving employee and student immunization records, staffing, student attendance, instructional continuity, and communication with families and employees.

Most importantly, schools that have not prepared in advance may find themselves making difficult operational decisions under extremely tight timelines.

In one recent Chester County situation, a high school and a Career and Technical School were both temporarily closed while the school leaders worked with local health officials to verify employee immunization records and determine whether sufficient staff could safely report to work.

The challenge was not simply identifying the students and staff who may have been exposed.

It also had to do with determining in a very short timeframe which individuals had documented immunity, and which would be required to remain home for an extended period.

The important lesson for all other schools is not to wait until a case is confirmed in your schools to begin preparing.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) has issued specific guidance for schools regarding measles prevention and response (attached).

Based on this guidance and the experiences of our colleagues in Chester County, we strongly encourage all school leaders to take the following action now in order to be prepared and not in a stressful time-constraint situation!

Recommended Preparatory Actions for School Leaders

Review and verify immunization records for students:

Verifying student immunizations are typically easily reviewed as schools are required to maintain student immunization records as per state law.

Direct your school health personnel to review student MMR immunization records and identify students whose documentation is incomplete or who may lack evidence of immunity. Maintain the list of students who lack immunity in the event of a measles occurrence in the building and the need to notify these parents/guardians immediately.

Review and verify immunization records for employees:

The more difficult task is verifying all your employees' immunization history. Most districts/schools do not have readily accessible documentation of measles immunity for all employees. This is one of the greatest operational vulnerabilities.

Collect this documentation now before a case occurs.

To collect this information from your staff:

- Work with your human resources department to establish a process for employees to provide documentation of measles immunity. Include teachers, administrators, support staff, substitutes, contracted personnel, and volunteers, as appropriate.
- Consult legal counsel and employee representatives regarding procedures for collecting, maintaining, and protecting confidential employee medical information.
- Establish a secure, accessible system that allows authorized personnel to identify individuals whose immunity has been documented.
- Coordinate with any contractors to obtain appropriate immunization documentation for bus drivers, aides, BCBAs, RBTs, instructional assistants, and other contracted personnel.

PA Department of Health identifies acceptable forms of evidence of immunity that includes appropriate vaccination documentation, laboratory evidence of immunity, laboratory confirmation of previous measles disease, and, generally, birth before 1957.

Do not assume that an employee who reports being vaccinated will necessarily have the documentation needed during a public health investigation. Each employee will need to provide an acceptable form of documentation.

If individual staff members cannot find their records, have them:

- Contact their personal healthcare provider to discuss their vaccination history or whether a measles immunity blood test, also called a titer, is appropriate.
- Check the PIERS Public Portal or request their immunization records from the Pennsylvania Department of Health.
- If they determine that they have not been vaccinated or are uncertain about your immunity, speak with their healthcare provider about receiving the MMR vaccine.

FYI from Chester County situation: Proactive immunization clinics are the fastest way for individuals without immunization records to be cleared.

Understand the potential 21-day exclusion period:

One of the most significant consequences of a measles exposure is the potential exclusion of students and employees who do not have acceptable documentation of immunity.

According to PA DOH guidance, exposed individuals without evidence of immunity may be excluded from school from the fifth day following their first exposure through the 21st day following their last exposure.

This can have substantial implications for school operations.

Consider what would happen if several teachers, paraprofessionals, transportation employees, or other essential personnel were required to remain home for an extended period.

The potential disruption is especially significant for specialized instructional programs, including special educa-

tion services, where qualified replacement personnel may already be difficult to secure.

Develop a measles response plan:

Work with your school nurses, administrative team, human resources personnel, and local health department to develop or update a clear response protocol.

Your plan should address:

- Who will serve as the district's primary contact with public health officials?
- How will a suspected case be identified, isolated, and reported?
- How quickly can student and employee immunization records be accessed?
- Who will assist public health officials with identifying potentially exposed individuals?
- How will decisions regarding exclusion, staffing, and school operations be coordinated?
- Who will communicate with employees, families, and the broader school community?
- What procedures do we have in place to ensure visitor logs, staff and student attendance records, and access records are readily accessible in the event of an exposure?

Remember that measles is highly contagious and can remain infectious in the air for up to two hours after an infected person leaves an area.

A suspected case should be promptly isolated, with appropriate precautions, and reported to public health authorities. Individuals suspected of having measles should be directed to contact their healthcare provider before arriving at a medical facility.

Prepare for potential staffing and instructional disruptions:

School leaders should evaluate the operational implications of a possible 21-day exclusion period.

Consider developing contingency plans for:

- Substitute teachers and essential support personnel.
- Special education staffing, related services, and required student supports.
- Transportation, food services, and other critical operations.
- Instructional continuity for students excluded from school.
- Employee leave, labor agreements, and applicable employment policies.
- Possible adjustments to school schedules or operations.

It is important to recognize that a confirmed measles case does not automatically require a school closure. Decisions regarding exclusions and operational adjustments should be made in consultation with public health officials.

Communicate proactively with employees and families:

Clear communication before a case occurs can reduce confusion, misinformation, and unnecessary disruption.

Consider sending communication to all employees and families (with a goal not to create alarm, but to ensure that our school communities are informed and prepared) which does the following:

- Explains the potential impact of measles exposure in a school setting.
- Encourages families and employees to review their immunization records.

- Provides information on how to obtain missing records or consult a healthcare provider regarding immunity.
- Explains the possibility of school exclusion following exposure.
- Reinforces the importance of reporting symptoms and remaining home when ill.
- Identifies where families and employees can obtain reliable public health information.

School leaders should also ensure that staff members understand the symptoms of measles, including fever, cough, runny nose, red or watery eyes, and a rash.

Other communication and coordination considerations:

- Create a school webpage that provides pertinent information and a link to the Health Department.
- Coordinate among nearby and county school districts to share effective approaches and coordinate services across the region. Parents and community members will inevitably compare how neighboring school districts respond to an outbreak, so regional coordination can help promote consistency where appropriate.

Establish direct communication with your local or state health departm

Do not wait until you have a confirmed case to establish a relationship with your local public health officials. PA DOH recommends that schools consult with their local or state health department before taking action in response to a suspected or confirmed communicable disease.

Health officials can assist with identifying exposed individuals, determining acceptable evidence of immunity, establishing exclusion and return-to-school requirements, and developing appropriate communications.

Schools without a county or municipal health department may contact PA DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258).

The recent experiences in Chester County demonstrate that an investment of time in planning and preparation today could prevent significant disruption to students, employees, and school operations tomorrow.

If you have not already done so, I strongly encourage you to bring together your leadership team, school health personnel and human resources staff in the coming days to review your readiness.

At a minimum, you should be able to answer three critical questions:

1. Do we know which students and employees have documented immunity to measles?
2. Do we have a clear, coordinated response plan should a case occur in one of our schools?
3. Are we prepared to maintain essential educational services if students or employees must be excluded for an extended period?

Preparation today protects the health of our school communities, preserves valuable instructional time, and helps us maintain the continuity of services our students and families depend upon.

Hopefully this guidance will help you to prepare and protect the health and instructional time of your students and staff should a potential measles case occur in your schools.

Important Resources for School Leaders:

Pennsylvania Department of Health:

- Measles: Information to Prevent Spread in School and Child Care Settings
- Measles: What You Need to Know
- Communicable and Vaccine-Preventable Diseases – School Health Guidance

Chester County Health Department:

- Measles Guidance for Schools
- Measles Outbreak Information

PA Department of Health Contact:
Phone: 1-877-724-3258

PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference Inspires Collaboration, Innovation and Purpose-Driven Leadership

Great leadership often begins with a willingness to step back, challenge familiar perspectives, and learn from the experiences of others. That spirit of collaboration brought school board directors, superintendents, and administrators from across Pennsylvania to Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in the Poconos October 18–20 for the 2026 PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference.

Featuring two prominent keynote speakers, more than 25 education sessions, new opportunities for peer discussion and a Western-themed exhibit hall, the three-day conference offered school leaders opportunities to gain fresh perspectives, exchange ideas and strengthen connections with colleagues from across the Commonwealth.

At the heart of the experience were messages about overcoming adversity, leading with purpose and turning ideas into meaningful action.

Keynote Speakers Inspire Leaders to Turn Challenges Into Opportunities

Two keynote presentations provided compelling perspectives on leadership, personal growth and the potential to make a lasting difference.

Dr. Nido Qubein: From Adversity to Success

Monday's general session featured Dr. Nido Qubein, an internationally recognized author, consultant and professor who serves as president of High Point University.

Drawing on his inspiring journey from adversity to success, Qubein shared insights shaped by his experiences as an author, educator and leader of a university recognized for its ambitious vision and continued growth.

His presentation offered attendees an opportunity to reflect on the qualities that help individuals move beyond obstacles, pursue ambitious goals and translate their vision into results.

For school leaders navigating competing priorities, resource constraints and the changing needs of their communities, those lessons served as a timely reminder that meaningful progress begins with a willingness to think differently and remain committed to a larger purpose.

Qubein's message reinforced the importance of leadership that combines vision with action—and the responsibility leaders have to create opportunities for others to succeed.

Montel Williams: Leadership That Creates Meaningful Change

On Tuesday, Montel Williams, Emmy Award-winning television host, decorated military veteran, bestselling author and advocate, brought the conference to a close with insights on leadership and creating meaningful change.

Williams' career has spanned military service, broadcasting, authorship and advocacy, offering a distinctive perspective on leadership across different settings and circumstances.

His closing presentation encouraged attendees to consider how their own experiences, influence and decisions can

contribute to positive change.

For school leaders and school board members, the message resonated with the daily work of leading complex organizations while keeping students, staff and communities at the center of decision-making. Effective leadership requires more than establishing a vision; it requires a determination to act, the ability to bring others along and a commitment to making a difference.

Learning From Colleagues and Exploring New Ideas

Beyond the keynote presentations, the conference's professional learning program offered more than 25 education sessions addressing issues facing school leaders and their communities.

Topics ranged from community partnerships and career and technical education to district branding and data-driven decision-making. The sessions provided opportunities for attendees to explore strategies, consider different approaches and identify ideas to bring back to their districts.

The conference also introduced five roundtable discussions focused on topics including board leadership, staffing shortages and legislative issues. These discussions created additional opportunities for participants to exchange experiences, compare approaches and learn from colleagues confronting similar challenges.

Celebrating Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Education

The conference also provided an opportunity to recognize individuals and organizations whose work demonstrates innovation, dedication and service to public education.

The School Leader Awards Dinner and Student Showcase brought together recognition of outstanding educational leadership and performances by student musicians and performers from across Pennsylvania.

The evening featured the Pennsylvania Education Innovation Awards, presented to:

- **Innovative Teacher Award:** Erin Loch, environmental science teacher, Upper Dublin School District.
- **Innovative School Leader Award:** Julien Drennan, assistant superintendent, Upper Dublin School District.
- **Innovative School Board Award:** Forest Hills School Board.

The awards highlighted the contributions of educators and school boards working to advance teaching and learning, strengthen school communities and develop innovative approaches to meeting student needs.

The William Howard Day Medal was presented to Michael I. Levin, Esq., PSBA's general counsel and a longtime leader in Pennsylvania school law. Established in honor of William Howard Day, the first African American school

board president in the United States, the award recognizes a legacy of service and leadership in public education.

PASA also recognized Dr. Michael Vuckovich of Windber Area School District as Pennsylvania's 2026 Superintendent of the Year, honoring his leadership and contributions to public education.

The evening's student performances reminded attendees of the true reason for our work each day. Audiences enjoyed performances by the Blue Mountain Choral Ensembles and Drama Club, East Stroudsburg High School North Chorale, and Pocono Mountain East Marching Band—showcasing the talent and opportunities that public schools cultivate beyond the classroom.

A Western-Themed Exhibit Hall Encouraged Exploration and Connection

The conference's Western-themed exhibit hall brought an additional element of energy and engagement to the three-day experience.

Featuring 140 booths, the exhibit hall connected attendees with organizations offering products, services and resources for K–12 education. The space also provided opportunities for exhibitors and school leaders to discuss emerging needs, explore potential partnerships and learn about solutions supporting school operations and student success.

Hands-on experiences were available through the GPS Learning Lab, while lasso demonstrations just outside the exhibit hall added a bit of Western flair.

Save the Date:
The 2027 PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference is scheduled for October 17–19, 2027, at Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in the Poconos.

Scenes from the 2026 PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference

Women's Caucus

Leading Through K-8 Reconfiguration

By Dr. Colleen Friend
Superintendent
Carlisle Area School District

In the Carlisle Area School District, we are preparing to transform the school experience for about 3,600 of our 5,200 students. By fall 2028, we plan to transition from our current arrangement to five K–3 primary schools, two intermediate schools for grades 4–6, one middle school for grades 7–8, and to maintain our existing high school for grades 9–12.

The plan includes building a new middle school, renovating and expanding the existing Mooreland Elementary School, establishing new attendance boundaries, and closing two elementary schools: LeTort and Mt. Holly Springs.

On paper, these are facility and enrollment decisions. For those who live them, they are deeply personal.

The need for change grew over time. Our buildings vary in age and condition, enrollment is uneven, and a student's opportunities should not depend on which elementary school they attend.

We wanted a more consistent program for every child and a configuration that could serve the district for years to come. That purpose has guided our work, but it hasn't erased the emotions that come with closing a neighborhood school or altering a familiar route to school.

We began with a committee of 95 people. Bringing many voices into the process took time and meant hearing ideas that didn't always align, but it also improved the work. Families, staff, and community members helped us see that a proposed configuration would affect more than building capacity.

They raised questions about school identity, transportation, sibling schedules, transitions, and what students might gain or lose. A plan that looks orderly on a map can feel very different to a parent picturing a child's first day in a new building.

As superintendent, I have learned to resist the urge to respond to grief with another slide of data. Enrollment figures and building assessments matter. We owe the public a clear explanation of our decisions.

But when someone tells me what LeTort or Mt. Holly Springs has meant to their family, my first responsibility is to listen. People can understand the district's reasons and still mourn a school that holds generations of memories. Both can be true.

The Board and our team have had to make decisions while continuing to communicate with those affected. That means explaining what we know, acknowledging what we're still working out, and returning with answers as plans become more specific.

It also means meeting with local governments, neighbors, and school communities. In Mt. Holly Springs, for

example, the conversation centers on the future of a building that has long been part of the borough. Maintaining those relationships matters beyond the day we decide.

The next stage is as important as the vote that set our direction. We have identified leaders for the reconfigured schools and begun the practical work of staffing, transportation, boundary setting, and student transitions. Our teams are meeting across the future K–3, 4–6, and 7–8 grade spans.

Questions about how sixth graders will transition into the new structure, where staff will serve, and how families will navigate new routines deserve careful answers. We cannot treat implementation as a checklist to complete after the public conversation ends.

There are encouraging milestones. We broke ground on the new middle school in May 2026, and the district is working toward a summer 2028 transition.

Yet groundbreaking is easier to celebrate than the many small decisions that follow. We will measure our success by whether students feel known, staff have what they need, and families can see the educational promise of the new configuration in their children's daily experiences.

This process has reminded me that leading through change requires sustained presence. Listening does not mean we can grant every request, and a decision does not end the need to listen.

My task is to keep the educational purpose clear while making space for honest questions, disappointment, and new ideas.

If we do so consistently, we can build more than new schools. We can carry our community's trust into the next chapter of our district.

Save the Date

WOMEN'S CAUCUS CONFERENCE

MAY 16-18, 2027

HOTEL HERSHEY

Professional Development

When the Keynote Speaker Doesn't Make It

By Mrs. Lynn Fuini-Hetten
Superintendent, Salisbury Township

The night before our opening convocation this year, I learned that our keynote speaker's flight had been canceled because of inclement weather.

We quickly moved to Plan B: Zoom.

An expensive Zoom session wasn't exactly what we had planned. The speaker was gracious and willing to reduce his fee given the circumstances, and while it wasn't ideal, it was doable. We adjusted the logistics and prepared to make it work.

Then, about an hour before we were scheduled to begin, I learned that the same weather causing the travel problems was also affecting his internet connection. He couldn't guarantee a reliable connection for the presentation.

So much for Plan B.

Now we had a sizable hole in the agenda and about an hour to figure out what to do with it.

I could have filled it. As a teacher, my colleagues used to joke that I could fill 40 minutes like the best talk show host. Give me a room full of people and some unexpected time, and I can usually figure something out.

But just because I could fill the time didn't mean I should.

To view upcoming professional learning opportunities, visit PASA's website or check out our calendar of events on Page 40.

Our original agenda was fairly traditional. We started with breakfast, activities, and time for staff to reconnect. From there, we planned to welcome new employees, recognize staff celebrating 20 and 30 years in Salisbury, hear brief messages from legislators and representatives from our Board and employee associations, and then transition to our keynote. We had reserved a significant portion of the morning for him.

Instead of scrambling to replace the keynote, we kept the parts of the morning that were already ours.

Staff had breakfast together and participated in optional activities. One of the biggest hits was our staff "charcuterie" table.

This was not cheese and crackers.

Think Post-it Notes, Sharpies, whiteboard markers, erasers, and other supplies people could actually use. Staff loved it. One of our custodians grabbed some Sharpies. A football

coach stopped in for whiteboard markers and erasers. Teachers stocked up on things for their classrooms.

It was simple, useful, and fun.

We welcomed new employees and recognized longtime Salisbury staff members. We heard from our guests and employee representatives. We shared Today is the Day to Be a Learner in Salisbury, a short video created by FireRock Productions featuring our own students and staff.

And because we suddenly had the time, we watched it twice.

The first time, we simply watched and enjoyed it. Then we talked about what people noticed and what resonated with them. We watched it again with those comments in mind. Instead of squeezing the video between other agenda items and moving on to the next thing, we actually had time to enjoy it.

That turned out to matter. The video was one of the things staff mentioned repeatedly in the survey. They talked about seeing our students, recognizing colleagues, and seeing Salisbury represented on the screen. One staff member described it as "so personal seeing our own students and teachers." Others called it inspiring, heartwarming, and a great representation of the district.

And I still had a message I wanted to share as superintendent.

I chose to read I Wish You Happiness to our full staff. It's a simple book, but its message felt right for the beginning of a school year and for the people sitting in that auditorium. I wanted our employees to know what I wished for them as we started another year together.

I didn't need an hour to deliver that message. And I didn't need to turn the unexpected opening in the agenda into a superintendent keynote. I shared what I wanted to share, and then we gave people some time back.

At the time, I was disappointed that the keynote we had planned wasn't going to happen.

Then I read the staff feedback.

One response stopped me:

"Honestly, NOT having a keynote speaker made this my best convocation in my career."

Well, there's some feedback for the superintendent.

But it wasn't the only comment that made me think.

"More networking, less talking."

"I was looking forward to the speaker but honestly it was nice just to be a whole group together."

Another staff member described the morning as "light and casual" and appreciated that the speakers kept their messages brief. That person added, "a guest speaker wasn't missed."

The feedback about the informal parts of the morning was just as telling. One person wrote, "Loved the breakfast and connection. The stations were great, especially the charcuterie!" Another appreciated that the activities weren't "forced socialization" and that people could participate on their own terms.

As I continued reading, a pattern emerged.

People talked a lot about reconnecting with colleagues. They appreciated seeing employees from other buildings whom they don't regularly see during the school year. They liked having everyone together. One person simply identified "the camaraderie" as what they liked about the morning. Another wrote, "Time to catch up with colleagues." Others mentioned networking with teachers from other buildings and seeing coworkers and friends they hadn't seen in a while.

They also responded strongly to seeing Salisbury reflected back to them.

One staff member specifically mentioned my superintendent message: "The read aloud book from Lynn...very nice." Others suggested involving even more students in future convocations through student speakers, the band, cheerleaders, or other opportunities.

Another comment particularly stayed with me: "I prefer people in our district or with connections speaking to us rather than an outsider. They are more meaningful presentations when they have community connection."

That feedback has me reconsidering some of my assumptions about opening convocation.

As school leaders, we put a lot of thought into these days. We want employees to leave feeling good about the year ahead. We search for speakers with messages that connect

to our work. We plan the agenda carefully. And if there is suddenly an open block on the schedule, our instinct is often to figure out how to fill it.

There is nothing inherently wrong with bringing in a keynote speaker. We have had excellent speakers in Salisbury over the years, and the feedback this year certainly didn't suggest that everyone wants us to eliminate outside speakers. Some staff specifically said they enjoy them.

But this experience made me wonder whether we sometimes overlook what is already in the room.

We have students with stories worth hearing. We have teachers, support staff, administrators, Board members, families, and community members who know our schools. We have longtime employees whose service deserves recognition and new employees we want to welcome. We have people doing interesting work across our organization who rarely have the opportunity to share it with colleagues.

And maybe most simply, we have people who need time with each other.

That matters at the beginning of a school year. Employees are returning after a summer apart. People who work in different buildings may see one another only a handful of times during the year. New employees are trying to figure out the organization they just joined. Everyone knows how quickly the pace changes once students arrive.

Our convocation gave them some time to reconnect before that happened.

We sometimes assume that making an opening day meaningful requires something big. This year, our staff told us they valued seeing their own students on the screen, recognizing their colleagues, hearing a simple message from their superintendent, having breakfast and time to talk with one another, and, yes, walking away with some Post-it Notes and whiteboard markers.

All of those things were already part of our original agenda. We just had more time to enjoy them.

Maybe that's worth paying attention to.

The experience also made me think about the resources we put into these events. Keynote speakers can be a significant investment. Sometimes that investment is worthwhile. But one staff member suggested that we "spend the money from a guest speaker somewhere else."

I'm not ready to conclude that Salisbury will never have another keynote speaker. That would be taking one experience and the feedback too far.

I am ready to ask a different question when we plan our next opening convocation.

Instead of starting with, Who should we bring in? maybe we start with, What do our people need from this time together?

The answer might be an outside speaker. It might be our students. It might be stories from our own employees. It might be celebrating what happened across our schools during the previous year.

And some of it might simply be time.

I've always been pretty good at filling 40 minutes.

This year reminded me that I don't always have to.

PDE Funding & Act 45 Credits Available for Each Session

New Superintendents Academy

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is pleased to announce a new partnership with the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) to offer a reduced cost for the PASA New Superintendents Academy (Academy).

The Academy provides a comprehensive professional learning experience along with a structured mentoring program to support leaders in their first year of service. Interested participants must register for both the full Academy and the mentoring program. Because the program is already underway, participants will join the Systems Leadership Session (November 5–6), Professional & Community Leadership (January 28–29), and Strategic & Cultural Leadership (September 2027). PDE funding begins with the November sessions and mentoring component.

Who Should Attend

- ***Assistant Superintendents***
- ***Superintendents***
- ***Assistant IU Executive Directors***
- ***IU Executive Directors***

What You'll Gain From the Program

- ✅ Practical strategies for navigating the challenges of the superintendency
- ✅ Leadership and governance tools to strengthen your effectiveness
- ✅ Insights from experienced superintendents who have been in your shoes
- ✅ A trusted network of Pennsylvania colleagues to turn to throughout your journey
- ✅ Greater confidence to lead your district through your first year and beyond

What a Previous Participant Shared

The content not only deepened my understanding of the role, but also offered concrete strategies and frameworks that I can apply directly to my district. I especially appreciated how the sessions connected theory to real-world examples, which made the learning even more meaningful.

The most rewarding aspects of the program were the opportunities to learn directly from experienced superintendents and to engage in discussions with colleagues who are navigating similar challenges. The content was highly relevant to the realities of the role,and the practical strategies, frameworks, and real world examples were salient.

– *Dr. Mwenyewe Dawan, Wissahickon School District*

Register for the PASA New Superintendents Academy

State News:

New Statewide Data Shows Youth Mental Health is Improving and Students Feel Safer in PA Schools

A statewide survey of more than 267,000 Pennsylvania students shows that investments under the Shapiro-Davis administration in youth mental health and school safety are delivering positive outcomes.

Mental health concerns, depression and suicide risk indicators are all declining among the commonwealth's youth, according to a Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) presentation provided at the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's (PCCD) School Safety and Security Committee meeting.

Read the rest of the story: "New Statewide Data Shows Youth Mental Health is Improving and Students Feel Safer in PA Schools" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 10-11-26)

PA Schools are Grappling with Screen Time. See Where Your School Stands

How much of your child's reading instruction happens on a screen? New data from Pennsylvania's Department of Education breaks down classroom screen time as parents across the commonwealth raise questions about whether their students are spending too much time on digital devices at school — part of a national wave of backlash to online and AI-driven learning.

Read the rest of the story: "PA Schools Are Grappling with Screen Time. See Where Your School Stands" (Pennlive, 10-13-26)

Project 2025 Plan Could Cost PA Schools Nearly $3B a Year, PSEA Says

Local educators joined Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) leaders Monday in South Abington Township to raise concerns about how proposals outlined in Project 2025 could affect federal funding for public schools.

The press conference at South Abington Community Park included representatives from the Abington Heights Education Association and the Abington Heights School Board. PSEA officials said some federal politicians were supporting Project 2025 policies that could threaten federal education funding.

Read the rest of the story: "Project 2025 Plan Could Cost PA Schools Nearly $3B a Year, PSEA Says" (CBS 21, 10-5-26)

With Sorting Hats and Slides, Pittsburgh Schools Embrace Centuries-Old House System

Pittsburgh Carmalt Principal Alexa Tokarski-Jones carefully hovered a Harry Potter-inspired "sorting hat" over a student who stood shyly for a second, waiting to hear which of four houses he would be sorted into. The word "Azure" boomed across the gym, spoken by a staff member hiding behind a stage curtain, sending the smiling student running to a blue-clad group of teachers who greeted him with hugs and high fives on a Friday morning in mid-September.

Read the rest of the story: "With Sorting Hats and Slides, Pittsburgh Schools Embrace Centuries-Old House System" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 9-30-26)

National News:

How K-12 Schools Might Narrow $80B Facility Repair Gap

Findings by a federal watchdog that students missed 3.5 million days last year because of plumbing, HVAC and other problems at public schools validate what facilities professionals have been saying for years, the head of the National Association of Energy Service Companies says. Facilities professionals have been raising the alarm that $80 billion in backlogged school maintenance and repairs are impacting students' learning experience, and now that's been quantified, said NAESCO Executive Director Timothy Unruh. The U.S. Government Accountability Office released findings last month showing that a fifth of school districts had to cancel classes at least once in the 2024-25 academic year because of facilities issues.

Read the rest of the story: "How K-12 Schools Might Narrow $80B Facility Repair Gap" (K-12 Dive, 10-14-26)

How New Federal Guidance on Disability Could Impact K-12 Special Education

New federal guidance that deemphasizes ensuring adults with disabilities can live in their communities could have trickle-down effects for public schools, researchers say. The U.S. Department of Justice issued guidance this summer stating it will not rely on the landmark Olmstead v. L.C. case of 1999 when enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act. Olmstead has for decades required that states eliminate unnecessary segregation of people with disabilities and ensure they receive services in "the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs."

Read the rest of the story: "How New Federal Guidance on Disability Could Impact K-12 Special Education" (EducationWeek, 10-14-26)

How K-12 Districts Sustain Lasting Device Programs

When new Chromebooks arrive at Desert Sands Unified School District, they come preconfigured and nearly ready to hand out to students.

That's because CDW, one of the district's technology solutions providers, unboxes each Chromebook, tags it and enrolls it in the district's Google domain — a service that the district pays a small per-device fee for. Zero-touch enrollment is a massive timesaver for its four cloud support technicians, who manage nearly 28,000 Chromebooks across 34 schools.

Read the rest of the story: "How K-12 Districts Sustain Lasting Device Programs" (EdTech, 10-13-26)

Ending E-Rate Would Deal Financial Blow to Schools, District Leaders Say

School leaders nationwide are urging the Federal Communications Commission to preserve the federal E-rate program.

The agency is considering overhauling or even discontinuing the 30-year-old program that offers discounted internet service rates for schools and libraries. On Tuesday, the public comment period closed for an FCC proposed rule that asks if E-rate policy changes are necessary given rampant concerns over screen time in schools. The FCC proposal further questions if E-rate "should be limited or sunset" because of the "extensive connectivity" that exists today.

Read the rest of the story: "Ending E-Rate Would Deal Financial Blow to Schools, District Leaders Say" (K-12 Dive, 10-13-26)

Strong Relationship are Critical to Building Student Resilience, Researchers Say

Educators can help build students' resilience by forging strong relationships with them, and building an open and caring culture, researchers say. That also includes normalizing failure during the learning process, putting trauma in context, encouraging civic engagement, and giving students chances to express themselves.

Being resilient doesn't mean "snapping back to your former state" after a challenging experience, said Rick Weissbourd, senior lecturer of education and faculty director of the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Read the rest of the story: "Strong Relationships are Critical to Building Student Resilience, Researchers Say" (K-12Dive, 10-7-26)

Keep Schools Connected: Recap of AASA Engagement to Protect E-Rate

By Noelle Ellerson Ng
Chief Advocacy & Governance, AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Over the past several months, AASA led a coordinated advocacy effort to protect E-Rate. Our work has combined formal filings, coalition-building, economic research, direct engagement with federal policymakers, public outreach and communications—all aimed at making clear what is at stake for public schools and the communities they serve:

- AASA co-chairs Education and Libraries Networks Coalition (EdLiNC), the coalition that represents E-Rate beneficiaries. In that role, AASA helped facilitate the coalition's comments, signed by 23 national organizations, opposing proposals that could dramatically narrow or eliminate E-Rate. AASA also filed its own comments, grounded in the realities of public school systems, and worked directly with the National Association for Pupil Transportation, National Rural Education Association, Association of Educational Service Agencies, Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, and Association of School Business Officials in filing their own stand-alone comments, further broadening the education community's response.
- AASA supported a Brattle Group economic impact analysis of E-Rate for the School Health Libraries Broadband(SHLB) Coalition (AASA is a member). The findings show that every dollar in E-Rate support is associated with approximately $1.60 in economic activity. Eliminating roughly $2.6 billion in annual funding could reduce GDP by an estimated $4.2 billion, wages by $2.8 billion and tax revenues by $1.5 billion annually.
- We also brought the district-level implications directly to federal policymakers. During FCC Commissioner Anna Gomez's visit to Bedford School District in New Hampshire, school leaders demonstrated how E-Rate-supported connectivity underpins instruction, student services and daily district operations. AASA documented the visit through an ex parte filing with the FCC, ensuring the discussion and firsthand observations were part of the public record.

- Perhaps most visible to members, our direct advocacy also included the Keep Schools Connected: Protect E-Rate resources, a website that equipped school leaders, partner organizations and communities to understand the proposals and take action. At least five national organizations co-branded materials and used the website to support their own outreach.
- In September, AASA's E-Rate Town Hall helped school leaders and stakeholders understand the potential consequences and ways to engage, generating strong press coverage, generating news coverage all the way through the comment period closing.

These efforts demonstrate AASA's commitment to E-Rate and its critical work in supporting district functions every day and are an example of effective advocacy: building coalitions, developing evidence, engaging decision-makers, equipping partners and ensuring that the voices of public

school leaders are heard.

AASA will continue making the case that affordable, reliable connectivity is essential infrastructure for public schools—and that federal decisions about E-Rate must account for the students, educators and communities who depend on it.

Updated PPRA Guidance Signals Uptick in Federal Student Privacy Enforcement

New guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) highlights their efforts to increase enforcement of the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). The guidance details how school districts must approach parental consent, student surveys and the collection of sensitive student information.

A quick reminder: PPRA is a federal law protecting parents' rights regarding student surveys, instructional materials, marketing activities, and certain physical exams in schools that receive funding from USED. PPRA addresses eight protected categories of sensitive information, including political beliefs, mental and psychological problems, sexual behavior, religious beliefs, and family relationships. PPRA also provides parents rights to inspect instructional materials, opt out of certain non-emergency physical exams, and protect students from certain commercial collection of personal information.

For superintendents and district leaders, the heightened federal scrutiny underscores the importance of reviewing existing policies and practices, particularly where student privacy protections intersect with schools' responsibilities to support student health, safety and well-being. The guidance represents a shift in how schools must comply with PPRA and expands the circumstances in which schools have to obtain affirmative written parental consent before administering surveys, screeners, and evaluations involving protected categories of information. The new interpretation could have far-reaching implications for school-based mental health and behavioral screeners, social-emotional learning, wellness check-ins, and threat assessments.

The Department also clarified that PPRA's requirements apply to surveys regardless of whether they are directly funded by the Department, potentially extending these obligations across virtually all surveys administered by public elementary and secondary schools receiving federal education funds.

A recent blog from the Public Interest Privacy Center (PIPC) provides an analysis of the Department's recent enforcement actions, evolving interpretation of PPRA and what districts should be watching as federal oversight intensifies. Read PIPC's synopsis here.

In the October Issue of School Administrator Magazine:

This issue examines various aspects of grading and assessment in an evolving educational system.

Articles include: What Students Say About Classroom Assessment and Grades; The Great Grading Debate: Two Sides of Awarding Zeros; Turning District Data into Better Decisions for Students; Redefining Success for Students; Principle 5: Measuring What Matters and more.

Quotes:

"If you've spent any time in leadership, you've learned painful truths: You can't fix everyone's problems. You can't erase a student's trauma. You can't save every struggling employee. You can't make every parent happy. You can't solve every family issue that walks through your front door. You can't carry everyone's burden. But... you can become the light that helps people find their way."

–Dan Stecken, Superintendent, Seneca Township High School District 160, Seneca, Ill. in "Fix You"

"We cannot predict the jobs today's kindergarteners will hold. But we can expect routine cognitive work to be increasingly completed by machines... Members of the Class of 2040 won't be defined by how well students use AI. They'll be defined by what they know, what they can judge and what they refuse to outsource. The goal isn't to produce better prompt writers. It's to develop better thinkers, problem-solvers and leaders."

– Amy Alzina, Superintendent, Cold Spring School District, Santa Barbara, Calif. in "From Chatbots to Teammates: Defining the Class of 2040"

"If grades exist to communicate what students know, zeros fail spectacularly. A zero announces that a student understands nothing--absolutely none of the assessed content. That's almost never true. More often, a zero measures missed deadlines, disorganization, family chaos or competing responsibilities."

–Kate Elliott, lead 7th grade mathamatics teacher at R.C. Edwards Middle School, Pickens County, S.C., in "The Zero Problem: Why Our Grading System Punishes Learning"

"Too often, district leaders review dozens of indicators while school leaders work tirelessly to meet competing expectations. The result is a culture that values reporting over improvement. Leaders spend significant time explaining performance rather than changing it."

–Eric Minus, Associate Superintendent for middle, K-8 and Charter Schools in Prince George's County Public Schools, Upper Marlboro, Md. in "Turning District Data into Better Decisions for Students"

Innovative Teaching and Learning:

Structuring the Screentime Conversation

By Dr. Scott Hand
Director of Technology, Radnor Township

There has been much made of the recent "screen time" conversations happening nationally and internationally. It is important for us as leaders to help steer this conversation as much as we can.

When public sentiment shifts on a complex educational issue, the pendulum can swing hard in the opposite direction.

It often requires our collective strength to slow it down, feet slipping against the gravel, but it is a worthy task to tackle.

Our goal is to ensure all stakeholders see the bigger picture, moving past reactive mandates to make the most informed, student-centered decisions possible.

Commotion

You might have been handed the books, read the latest headlines, watched the news clips, or heard of the sweeping bans and strict policies being implemented in districts nationally and internationally. As leaders, we find ourselves up against media perpetuation and the formidable machine of publishing company promotion, both eager to capitalize on the anxiety of the moment.

Some of this wave is based on genuine emotion, some based on persuasive editorial pieces, and some on empirical research. In the midst of this commotion, the temptation, and the public pressure, to flatly reject digital tools or issue blanket bans is strong. However, reacting too quickly without a systemic view can have severe, unforeseen ramifications for modern teaching and learning.

While we are at the height (hopefully) of this fervor, our immediate job is not to debate, but to first create intentional space. We have to leave extra room for parents, educators, and community members to share their questions, their anxieties, and their concerns without immediate defense from us. Truly hearing their issues does two vital things: it gives us the insight needed to craft meaningful, responsive next steps, and it keeps us from moving too fast in a direction we might later regret.

Counter Narratives

As school leaders, we know that there is educational and psychological research reflecting both sides of this complex

conversation. We have studies that highlight the cognitive benefits of interactive, personalized learning technology, right alongside studies warning against the negative impacts of excessive, passive digital engagement.

While having this research at our fingertips is crucial for grounding our internal leadership strategy, simply sharing counter-data will not always advance the public conversation.

In fact, when we present balanced research to a community swept up in a cultural narrative, we often encounter deep cognitive dissonance. When people are faced with data that challenges their pre-existing beliefs or emotional investment, they frequently double down, clinging to alternative facts or anecdotes. Facts rarely win an argument that is rooted in fear. To move forward, we must look beyond a war of citation counts.

Commonality

Instead of leading with statistics, our first goal must be to find areas of genuine agreement. Before we can talk about solutions, we must establish shared values with our critics and concerned parents.

Perhaps we can begin by agreeing that the core issue might not be the device itself, but rather the nature of the content that appears on it. We can easily find common ground

around the well-documented ills of targeted social media algorithms, persuasive design practices, and the endless structural loops engineered specifically to capture our children's attention, and, if we are being honest, perhaps ours, too.

By distinguishing between educational technology used intentionally for creation and commercial technology designed for endless desire, we lower the collective temperature. We pivot from an all-or-nothing debate about screens to a shared commitment to protecting our students' mental health and focus.

Convenings

Once we have established common ground, the next step is designing intentional spaces where our community can come together to talk through these complexities. Convenings offer us a way to invite parents, teachers, and students into the ongoing dialogue, ensuring that our community feels heard and valued as partners in the process.

These gatherings are most effective when they are structured around shared inquiry rather than formal presentations. By organizing small, facilitated discussion groups, we give everyone a seat at the table to share their perspectives on how technology intersects with daily learning, student well-being, and home life.

These sessions allow us to listen deeply to local experiences, demystify what is happening inside our classrooms, and build a collective understanding of what balanced digital citizenship looks like.

How we structure these conversations is deeply important, as the framework we choose sets the tone for the entire dialogue. By moving away from reactive formats and designing sessions grounded in partnership and mutual inquiry, we transform an abstract national debate into a constructive, community-driven effort that naturally transitions our focus toward our core purpose.

Cause

To keep these convenings productive and grounded, we must anchor every conversation around our overarching goals. Continually bring your community back to your district's mission, vision, core values, and Profile of a Graduate.

These foundational elements are your cause and our ultimate purpose.

When a discussion begins to derail into emotional hyperbole or rigid mandates, use your shared vision as a tether.

Using this as our north star, we can reframe the debate around some essential questions:

1. "What skills, attributes, and competencies does it take to prepare our students for the world they will enter?"

2. "What are the appropriate tools required to assist us in making this vision a reality for our students?"

3. In what ways can we ensure balance to equip our students, guided by intentional instructional design?

When framed through the lens of cause, technology ceases to be an ideological battleground; it returns to its proper place as a tool, one of many, designed to serve human learning and growth.

Compass

As you plan out your steps, consider the following topics:

- Screen Time vs. Screen Value: Moving beyond raw time-on-device metrics to evaluate the actual purpose, depth, and cognitive impact of digital tools in the classroom.
- Student Agency and Digital Health: Fostering long-term self-regulation, mindfulness, and healthy habits so

students learn to manage technology rather than letting technology manage them.

- Equity and Access Considerations: Ensuring that any adjustments to our digital policies protect equitable access for vulnerable learners and respect diverse home learning environments.
- Instructional Design 2.0: We have the opportunity to refocus our professional development efforts toward intentional instructional design principles that empower educators to co-create intentional, blended learning frameworks where technology actively enhances, rather than replaces, sound pedagogy.

Moving Ahead Together

Navigating this landscape requires patience, empathy, and strategic clarity.

The PASA Innovative Teaching and Learning Committee is hoping to assist in addressing some of these issues this year, share best practices and research, and find practical ways to support each other as educational leaders.

Together, we can slow the pendulum, ground the noise, and lead our communities toward a thoughtful, balanced path forward.

Thank you to our Gold Sponsors:

mcclure company

ten
a DLH company

FITHQ
FITNESS HEADQUARTERS

Personalized Leadership Coaching for School Leaders

Superintendent Enhanced Support Program | New Superintendent Induction Program

Take your leadership to the next level with premier coaching and mentorship through PASA

PASA matches current or acting Superintendents with experienced current and/or former Superintendents for personalized, one-on-one coaching. All PASA coaches are trained in coaching and mentoring.

Support includes:

- **Board and team communication**
- **District leadership strategy**
- **Budget and priority planning**
- **Issue management and problem-solving**
- **On-call guidance when you need it**

Flexible Support. Designed Specifically for you.

The PASA Superintendent Enhanced Support Program and the New Superintendent Induction Program offers three coaching options to match your leadership needs, timeline, and budget:

Comprehensive: 12 months of in-depth, ongoing support
Consolidated: Focused coaching over 6 or 12 months
Customized: Ala carte support; Project-based and tailored to your district priorities

Explore program details, pricing, and application information at PASA's website.

PASA

PASA Awards of Achievement

Service to the Profession | Instructional Leadership | Leadership in Public Education

Nominations due by November 27.

Great leadership deserves to be recognized—and PASA's Awards of Achievement provide an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the school administrators who are making a meaningful difference in their districts, communities and the profession.

Do you know a colleague whose leadership deserves to be celebrated? Take a moment to nominate them—or nominate yourself—by November 27. A nomination is a meaningful way to recognize the impact an administrator is having and ensure their contributions receive the attention they deserve!

The awards fall into three categories:

Service to the Profession

Demonstrating commitment to excellence as evidenced through notable service to the profession. Examples of this service may include developing and implementing a new and creative program or system in your schools, developing an effective professional development program for school district educators, demonstrating leadership in administrator preparation programs, school study councils or other professional development efforts, or promoting the education profession through research, writing or organizational service.

Sponsored by:

Horace Mann

Instructional Leadership

Demonstrating commitment to excellence in teaching and learning by developing, nurturing and supporting exemplary programs that support the academic achievement of particular student populations, enrich student learning in a particular content area, or implement strategies to enhance student learning across the curriculum.

Sponsored by:

LINCOLN INVESTMENT

Leadership in Public Education

Demonstrating commitment to school administration as a profession, to public education, and to one's colleagues, including participation in and leadership with the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

Sponsored by:

PLGIT
Pennsylvania Local Government Investment Trust

Eligibility:

All PASA members are eligible for Awards of Achievement recognition. Individuals may self-nominate or be nominated by their peers, staff or board.

Make Your Nomination(s):

Those nominating/self-nominating should complete the PASA Awards nomination form and include and/or attach further information that will provide a judging panel with sufficient evidence to support the nomination.

Presentation to the Award Winners:

The PASA Awards of Achievement will be presented during PASA's signature conference, the Leadership Forum, on March 31-April 2 at the Penn Stater in State College.

A monetary award of $1,000 will be donated in each recipient's name to a scholarship fund of his/her choice or to the Pennsylvania administrator preparation program of his/her choice.

Click here to make a nomination.

Writing Out Loud

Learning from the Animal Kingdom: What the Safari Can Teach Us About Leadership and Communication

By Adam Kulikowski
Director of Communications, PASA

School leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered at Kalahari Resorts for the PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference earlier last week.

Step inside Kalahari Resorts, and it doesn't take long to feel transported to another world. Safari-inspired imagery, exotic animal designs, and the sights of an African adventure surround you at every turn.

Giraffes tower overhead, zebras display their unmistakable stripes, and lions project an unmistakable sense of authority. It's an environment designed to capture your attention—but it offers some surprisingly fitting reminders about leadership.

The leaders of the Safari invite us to think about the qualities that help school leaders navigate unfamiliar terrain, bring people together, and guide their organizations through changing conditions. Leading a school district requires awareness, adaptability, trust, and clear communication.

And if we look a little closer at the animals that fill Kalahari, we can glean a few lessons worth bringing back to our districts.

The lion: Lead with confidence, but listen to your pride.

Lions are often associated with strength and leadership, but even the king of the jungle depends on the pride. School leaders may set the direction, establish priorities, and make difficult decisions, but they cannot succeed in isolation. Strong communication means sharing a clear vision while creating opportunities for others to contribute.

Whether communicating with staff, families, school boards, or community partners, the best leaders balance confidence with collaboration. Build a shared understanding of where the district is headed and why the journey matters.

The elephant: The power of connection.

Elephants are known for their strong social bonds, cooperation, and remarkable communication. They use sounds, gestures, and even vibrations to stay connected across distances.

School districts are also built on relationships. A superintendent's message may travel through administrators, teachers, support staff, families, and

community members. Every interaction shapes how that message is understood.

Effective communicators recognize that relationships are built long before a crisis. Regular updates, transparent conversations and meaningful engagement help establish the trust districts need when difficult news must be shared.

Like elephants, leaders should remember that staying connected is essential to navigating challenges together.

The giraffe: Get a better view before deciding what to say.

With their extraordinary height, giraffes have an amazing view of their surroundings. School leaders need that same willingness to step back and see the bigger picture.

A message that makes perfect sense inside the central office may be received very differently by a parent, teacher, school board member, or local media. Before communicating a decision, consider the perspectives of those affected.

What questions will they have? What context might they be missing? What assumptions could lead to

misunderstanding?

The best communication doesn't simply deliver information. It anticipates the audience's needs and makes complex decisions understandable. Sometimes, the most important step in crafting a message is taking the time to see the situation from another view point.

The zebra: Stand out through consistency.

Every zebra has a distinctive pattern, but the herd also demostrates the power of collective strength. For school leaders, the lesson is to develop a recognizable voice while maintaining a consistent collective message.

District communications should reflect the values, priorities, and identity of the community they serve.

When leaders communicate consistently across platforms and audiences, people know what to expect and where to find reliable information. Messages conflict or change without explanation can create confusion.

Think of consistency as ensuring that every message reinforces the district's mission and reflects its commitments.

The cheetah: Move quickly, but know when to slow down.

The cheetah is built for speed, but even the fastest animal must choose its moment carefully. In an era of instant notifications and social media, school leaders can feel pressure to respond immediately to every question, controversy, or developing story.

Speed matters, especially when student safety or an urgent community concern is involved. But a rushed response can create new problems if facts have not been verified or the implications have not been considered.

Effective communication requires both urgency and judgment.

Know when to act quickly, when to consult others, and when to take a moment to ensure that a message is accurate, thoughtful, and appropriate. Being first is not always the same as being effective.

What to Take away:

The safari theme at Kalahari offers a colorful metaphor to share lessons that can create a lasting impact in your school community.

- Lead with confidence and collaboration.
- Build relationships before you need them.
- Stay alert to emerging concerns.
- Understand your audience.
- Communicate consistently.
- Balance speed with sound judgment.

Communication is embedded into every aspect of leadership. Every conversation, decision, and interaction tells people something about who we are, what we value, and where we intend to go.

As we leave Kalahari and return to our districts, let's bring home a renewed commitment to communicate with clarity, purpose, and trust.

The best leadership stories aren't told through a single speech or a big announcement.

They're built day by day—in the way we listen, the questions we ask, and the confidence we give others to move forward.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

2027 PASA Leadership Forum

RFP Submission deadline: November 30, 2026

2027 PASA Leadership Forum:

March 31-April 2, 2027

The Penn Stater | State College

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) invites you to a submit proposal for a 60-minute learning session for our 2027 PASA Leadership Forum- a statewide gathering of bold thinkers, trailblazers, and system leaders.

This year we are seeking presentations centered around system redesign- innovative ideas that challenge traditional thinking and better prepare students for success after graduation.

Whether your district has implemented a districtwide transformation or launched a single innovative program, we want to hear your story.

Learning Session Strands:

We're seeking high-quality, inspiring proposals in the following focus areas:

- **Rethinking Time:** How are you redesigning the school experience through innovative use of time?
- **Rethinking Learning:** How are you creating learning experiences that are more engaging, personalized and relevant?
- **Rethinking Readiness:** How are you preparing students for life beyond graduation?
- **Rethinking Assessment:** How are you measuring learning in ways that better reflect student growth and student readiness?
- **Rethinking Relationships:** Great schools are built on strong relationships. How are you strengthening connections among students, educators, families, businesses, and communities?

Important Dates to Know:

- November 30: Proposal Submission Deadline
- February 1, 2027: All presenters will be notified of their selection by this date.
- April 1-2, 2027: Learning Sessions are currently scheduled for the morning and afternoon of April 1 and the morning of April 2, 2027.

Click the link below view the full details and begin your application to present at the 2027 PASA Leadership Forum!

Click here to learn more and apply to present.

By Ann McMullan
Project Director, CoSN

CoSN
Leading Education Innovation

CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report:

Change Management for Education Technology: A Practical Guide for District Leaders

The *CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report* was published in late September 2026. This year's annual Blaschke Report delves into how school districts can leverage effective change management to lead and sustain new technology tools for teaching and learning.

Along with the publication of the *CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report*, CoSN is also pleased to provide a free *School District Technology Change Management Toolkit* which includes specific resources that district leaders can use as they implement the CoSN 2026 *Blaschke Report's* recommendations.

The lead author of the CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report is Jesse Davis, CoSN's 2026 Blaschke Fellow.

Mr. Davis holds a Masters of Public Policy in Technology Policy from The Duke Sanford School of Public Policy and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Berea College.

The content described in the *CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report* includes a focus on building a district's change process around five specific outcomes: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement.

These outcomes are identified as the ADKAR model. Among the strategies implemented when doing the research for the 2026 report were interviews with both technology leaders and education leaders from small, mid-sized and large public-school systems across the United States.

CoSN has also released the *School District Technology Change Management Toolkit* which provides practical resources for implementing the *CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report* recommendations. Both the *School District Technology Change Management Toolkit* and the *CoSN 2026 Blaschke Report* can be accessed at:

https://www.cosn.org/change-management-for-education-technology-a-practical-guide-for-district-leaders/.

CoSN/AASA EmpowerED Superintendents edLeader Panel Broadcasts

Free registration access to upcoming (as well as previously broadcast) monthly CoSN/AASA EmpowerED Superintendents edLeader Panel Broadcasts is available on edWeb.net at https://home.edweb.net/supers/. The next live EmpowerED Superintendents edLeader Panel Broadcast is scheduled for Monday, November 9, 2026, at 5:00 PM Eastern Time and will focus on *"Tips and Strategies from the 2026 EdTech Quality Collaborative's Indicators Guide".*

CoSN Membership:

If you, your school or district would like more information about joining CoSN or getting more involved with CoSN, please contact membership@cosn.org

UPCOMING EVENTS!

PASA

October 28-29	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *Aligning Vision with Resources: Unlocking the Power of Multi-Year Budgeting*
November 5-6	**New Superintendent Academy:** *Systems Leadership (Part 2)*
December 10-11	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *Integrating Operations into Your District Ecosystem*
January 28-29, 2027	**New Superintendent Academy:** *Professional & Community Leadership*
February 17-18, 2027	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *Beyond Compliance: Building a Road Map for Sustainable Success*
March 10-11, 2027	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *When Every Word Matters: Strategic and Effective Communication for Superintendents*
March 31 to April 2, 2027	**PASA Leadership Forum:** *The Penn Stater, State College, PA*
April 21-22. 2027	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *Building Relationships for Successful Negotiations*