THE PASA Flyer

Vol. 68, NO. 11- September 2026

Uniting visionary leaders, shaping the future of public education

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From the Executive Director

We Cannot Solve Tomorrow's Challenges in Yesterday's Silos

By Dr. Sherri L. Smith
Executive Director, PASA

For generations, Pennsylvania public education has been built around local leadership and local decision-making.

Our school districts, career and technical centers, intermediate units, colleges and universities, and community organizations each have distinct responsibilities, governance structures, funding streams, and communities to serve.

That local identity is one of the strengths of public education in Pennsylvania. It allows schools to reflect their communities, respond to local needs, and build relationships close to the students and families they serve.

Increasingly, however, the challenges confronting our schools and organizations do not stop at organizational or geographic boundaries.

We are at a point where we need to ask a difficult question:

Can we continue to afford to operate as individual organizations attempting to solve many of the same problems independently?

I don't believe we can. The challenges facing public education have become too complex, too expensive, and too interconnected for us to continue approaching them primarily within the walls of our individual organizations.

We are confronting significant workforce shortages. Special education costs and demands continue to place tremendous pressure on school systems. Career and technical education and workforce programs must expand and evolve rapidly enough to meet changing workforce needs.

Districts are being asked to provide increasingly specialized programs and services while navigating enrollment changes, rising personnel and operational costs, and finite taxpayer resources.

At the same time, declining enrollment in some communities, changing demographics, increasing costs, and greater expectations for student opportunities are forcing us to ask an important question:

Are we trying to solve regional problems with individual organizational solutions?

From Cooperation to Regionalization

Pennsylvania educators have always collaborated. Superintendents talk with neighboring superintendents. Intermediate units provide shared services. Career and technical centers bring districts together. Schools partner with colleges, universities, employers, healthcare organizations, and community agencies.

But the environment ahead of us requires something more intentional than collaboration. It may require us to begin thinking and leading **regionally.**

That does not mean eliminating local control or losing organizational identity. It does not have to mean consolidation. And it certainly does not mean that every region of Pennsylvania should look the same.

Rather, it means recognizing that there are some challenges we can address—and some opportunities we can create—far more effectively together than independently.

The question shifts from ***"What can my schools/ organization provide?"*** to ***"What should every student in our region be able to access, and how can we collectively make that possible?"***

That is a significant change in mindset!

CTE Provides a Powerful Example

Career and technical education provides a compelling example.

Across Pennsylvania, we have outstanding CTCs, innovative school districts, committed educators, engaged employers, and students eager for meaningful career pathways.

But we also have students waiting to access high-demand programs. We have expensive equipment and facilities that individual systems cannot continually duplicate. We have employers seeking workers with specific skills.

Yet access, capacity, programming, transportation, governance, and funding can vary considerably from community to community.

No individual district, CTC, or IU can provide every program that our students will need to prepare them for Pennsylvania's future economy.

That fact should challenge us to change our approach and think regionally. Our goal should be to create a **regional system of opportunity for all students.**

Imagine a region where students can access the programs, experiences, credentials, and career pathways they need regardless of which individual district they attend.

Imagine employers, schools, CTCs, higher education, and community partners intentionally aligning their resources rather than each trying to build every piece independently.

That is the opportunity regional thinking creates.

Special Education Demands the Same Conversation

Special education services and programs present an equally urgent challenge.

School leaders across Pennsylvania are confronting growing costs, staffing shortages, increasingly complex student needs, compliance demands, specialized transportation, litigation and due-process expenses, and difficulty maintaining highly specialized programs for a growing number of students.

Could an expanded regional approach allow us to reinvest resources now consumed by duplication and inefficiency into classrooms and student services?

These are conversations we need to be willing to have.

Building the Infrastructure for Regional Leadership

Another reason this work cannot wait is the fiscal reality facing us all. Every superintendent, executive director, and school business official understands the pressure of increasing costs and the challenge of balancing a budget while maintaining the programs and services students and communities expect.

We must continue advocating for adequate and equitable state investment in public education. But advocacy for additional resources must be accompanied by an equally serious commitment to examining **how we use the resources we already have and how we support one another through a regional approach.**

Regional collaboration cannot depend solely on good relationships among current leaders. It requires developing a regional infrastructure where superintendents, CTC leaders, IU leaders, higher education, and community organizations and partners can identify shared priorities and map regional assets rather than independently creating new programs and services.

Perhaps the hardest part of this work is loosening the grip on institutional ownership. Educational leaders are

appropriately proud of their organizations and students they serve. But sometimes that pride can unintentionally create walls.

Regional leadership requires a different vocabulary: **Our students. Our workforce. Our communities. Our region.**

Pennsylvania does not lack resources, expertise, organizations, or innovation. The question is whether we are connecting those assets intentionally enough. We need to know what exists, identify what is missing, remove the barriers that prevent access, and build the partnerships necessary to fill the gaps.

We have spent decades building strong individual organizations. Now it is time to build the connections between them. **This may be some of the most important work Pennsylvania's school leaders undertake in the decade ahead.**

Looking forward to doing that work together, Sherri

Regional News:

Region 8:
Richland School District Superintendent Arnold Nadonley announced plans to retire on June 30 after 12 years at the district and nearly 40 in education.

Region 22:
The Bensalem Township School District Board of School Directors will vote next week to appoint Victoria Velazquez as the district's next Superintendent. Velazquez has served in the district for more than 12 years, including as Interim Superintendent since April when she replaced Samuel Lee.

Region 22:
Morrisville School District hired Daniel Clara as the district's next Superintendent at its September meeting. Clara previously served as Assistant to the Superintendent at Southmoreland School District. Elaine Eib has led the district on an interim basis since Andrew Doster stepped down in January.

Region 23:
The Norristown Area School District recently hired Dr. Dorrell Green to serve as its next school leader. Green oversaw the largest school district in Delaware, Red Clay, with more than 15,000 students. His leadership in the Delaware district led to recognition as the 2026 Delaware Superintendent of the Year.

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.")

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

From the President's Pen

A Year of Gratitude, A Legacy of Resilience

By Mr. Christopher Dormer
2025-26 PASA President

As I conclude my year of service as President of PASA, I find myself reflecting not on accomplishments, initiatives, or milestones, but on people.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of connecting with colleagues from every corner of our Commonwealth.

I have listened to stories of challenge and triumph, celebrated successes both large and small, and witnessed firsthand the extraordinary dedication that defines educational leadership in Pennsylvania. While every district faces its own unique circumstances, the one common thread that has emerged in every interaction with school leaders is an unwavering commitment to students.

It has been the honor of my life to represent and serve an organization comprised of outstanding people who wake up each day focused on creating opportunities for children.

When I began this journey, I understood the demands of the superintendency. What I came to appreciate even more during my year as president was the collective strength of our profession.

Superintendents are asked to navigate increasingly complex challenges while maintaining focus on what matters most. We balance budgets, address staffing shortages, respond to emerging needs, and often serve as the bridge between competing perspectives. Yet through it all, we continue to lead with integrity, purpose, and a deep belief in the promise of public education.

That belief has never been more important.

The past several years have tested educational leaders in ways few could have imagined. We have faced uncertainty, scrutiny, and rapidly changing expectations. At times, the challenges have seemed relentless.

What has stood out most is not the adversity itself, but has been our response to always prioritize the needs and best interests of students, families, staff, and community members.

Resilience is a word that is often used in education, but I have come to believe it is best defined not by enduring hardship alone, but by finding ways to move forward despite it. Resilience is demonstrated by leaders who remain focused on students despite competing demands.

It is reflected in school boards that remain committed to long-term success by trusting their administrative leaders to effectively run their districts. It is evident in educators who continue to inspire each and every student to learn and to lead every day.

Most importantly, resilience is found in our willingness to support one another.

Throughout the last eight years I have served as a superintendent, I have been reminded repeatedly that none of us does this work alone.

One of PASA's greatest strengths has always been the relationships that exist among its members. Whether sharing advice with a new superintendent, offering encouragement during a difficult season, or collaborating to advocate for public education, our organization exemplifies the power of professional community.

For that, I am profoundly grateful.

I am grateful to the PASA staff whose dedication and expertise make the organization a trusted voice for educational leadership. I am grateful to our Executive Committee and Board of Governors for their guidance and partnership. Most importantly, I am grateful to every PASA member who continues to lead with courage, compassion, and conviction.

You have inspired me more than you know.

As this chapter concludes, another begins. To ensure I will be able to best support my family, I have transitioned into work that is what I like to call "education adjacent." While my professional role has changed, my commitment to public education will not. The lessons I have learned throughout my career, and particularly during this past year, will continue to guide me. The relationships built through PASA will remain among my most valued professional connections.

I leave the PASA Board with tremendous pride and optimism about the future of our schools and the leaders who serve them. Pennsylvania's students are fortunate to be supported by some of the finest educational leaders in the nation. I have seen your dedication. I have witnessed your resilience. And I have complete confidence in your ability to meet whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

So, rather than saying goodbye, I simply want to say thank you.

Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your leadership.

As I move into this next chapter of my professional life, please know that I remain a passionate advocate for public education and a steadfast supporter of each of you.

I look forward to continuing the relationships we have built, supporting the important work you do, and finding new ways to contribute to the success of the students and communities we all serve.

The title may change, but the calling remains the same.

Christopher Dormer has been proud to serve as the 2025-2026 PASA President.

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Women's Caucus

Check Your Course: Leading with Purpose Through the Year Ahead

By Dr. Isabel Resende,
Nazareth School District
Dr. Michele Schoeneberger,
Northampton Area School District

Pause, reflect, and make sure your leadership is still taking you where you want to go.

By now, the school year is moving.

The calendars are full. Meetings have multiplied. Plans that looked perfectly reasonable a few months ago have met the realities of people, competing priorities, and the unexpected. Some initiatives are gaining momentum; others need adjustment. Amid the emails, problems, meetings, and decisions, it is remarkably easy to become so focused on moving forward that we forget to ask whether we are still moving in the direction we intended.

That is why now may be the best time to pause.

Not stop. Not start over. Just pause long enough to check our course.

As the school year takes shape, we have been thinking about what it really means to find our way as leaders. We often talk about leadership as though we choose a destination, create a plan, and steadily work our way toward it. Anyone who has been in educational leadership for more than five minutes knows it rarely works that way. Our paths are shaped by unexpected opportunities, difficult decisions, people who challenge and inspire us, and more than a few detours we never saw coming.

Leadership is far more dynamic.

Conditions change. People change. Organizations change. We change.

Sometimes the destination remains exactly right, but the path changes. An unexpected opportunity may cause us to reconsider where we are headed. At other times, we become so focused on what is immediately in front of us that we need to pause and remember why we chose the destination in the first place.

So, as we move deeper into the year, we invite you to take a few minutes, not to create another plan or add another item to your to-do list, but simply to check your leadership course.

My Destination: Where am I trying to go?

Think about what you want to be different because of your leadership this year.

Maybe you want to strengthen your team, advance an initiative, improve communication, grow more comfortable with difficult conversations, or be more intentional about developing others.

Then ask yourself: *Am I actually spending my time on what I said mattered?*

That can be an uncomfortable question.

Leadership has a way of filling every available minute. We can work incredibly hard, accomplish a tremendous

amount, and still realize that the work we said mattered most has barely moved.

Being busy and making progress are not always the same thing.

Sometimes checking our destination simply means giving ourselves permission to reflect and refocus.

My Next Step: What can I do now?

If you discover that you have drifted a little off course, resist the temptation to design an elaborate correction plan.

Choose one next step.

Schedule the conversation you have been putting off. Ask someone for feedback. Protect time for work that requires deeper thinking. Reach out to a colleague. Delegate something you do not need to own. Say yes to an opportunity that stretches you, or perhaps say no to something that is pulling you away from what matters more.

Leadership growth often happens through small choices made consistently.

We do not need to have the entire journey figured out. We just need to know the next right step.

My Compass: What is guiding me?

This may be our favorite question because leadership constantly presents us with situations for which there is no perfect answer and no roadmap that tells us exactly what to do next.

When that happens, what guides you?

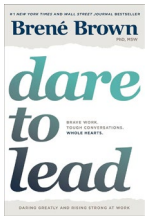
Is it courage? Integrity? Empathy? Curiosity? Grace? Persistence? Service?

Our values become our compass when the path is unclear.

They remind us that leadership is not only about the decisions we make, but also about how we make them. Our titles may give us the authority to lead; our values determine how people experience that leadership.

As the school year begins to take shape, it is worth asking: Am I leading in a way that reflects my core values?

Leadership Exercise: Making Core Values Visible



Drawing on Brené Brown's *Dare to Lead*, invite each member of your leadership team to complete Brown's core values exercise and identify the values that matter most to them. This simple act of reflection can create a clearer compass for the complex decisions educational leaders make each day.

Then make those values visible. A small desk frame, card, or other personal artifact featuring each leader's selected values can become a daily anchor, a quiet reminder to ground our work in what matters most as we support teachers and lead with intention.

My Crew: Who is traveling with me?

One lesson we continue to learn is that leadership was never meant to be a solo journey.

We need people who understand the work, colleagues who will listen when the day has been difficult, celebrate when things go right, offer perspective when we cannot see beyond the immediate problem, and challenge us to think differently.

For women in leadership, these relationships can be especially important.

There is tremendous value in having other women leaders who can say, "I have been there," "Have you thought about it this way?" or, sometimes, simply, "Keep going."

That is part of what makes the PASA Women's Caucus so

meaningful. Our paths may be different, but the journey becomes richer, and often a little easier, when we learn from one another.

And a good crew does more than support us. They challenge us. We all need people who care enough to tell us when we may be heading in the wrong direction.

My Commitment: Who am I helping move forward?

As women leaders, we should also ask who we are helping come forward.

Who have you encouraged lately? Whose potential have you noticed? Who needs an invitation, an opportunity, an introduction, or simply someone saying, "You should consider this. I think you are ready."

Most of us can identify someone who did that for us.

One of our greatest responsibilities as leaders is to do the same for others. Our leadership pathway should not be measured only by how far we travel, but also by whether we make the path a little wider for the women who follow.

So, wherever you find yourself, take a moment to check your course.

Revisit your destination. Take the next step. Trust your compass. Lean on your crew. And look around for someone you can help move forward.

The goal is not to follow a perfectly straight path. Leadership rarely offers one.

The goal is to remain intentional enough to recognize when we need to adjust, courageous enough to change direction when necessary, and connected enough to remember that none of us needs to navigate the journey alone.

Sometimes strong leadership is not about moving faster. Sometimes it is about being purposeful enough to check the course, and courageous enough to adjust it, so we remain headed toward what matters most.

New PASA Sponsor!

PASA is honored to welcome the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials as a Diamond sponsor.

For more information on PASBO, visit:

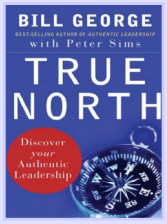
www.PASBO.org

Books for the Journey

Looking for a little inspiration as you continue to grow your leadership? Consider adding one of these to your reading list:

For Your Compass: True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership

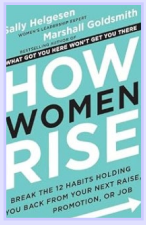
By: *Bill George*



A thoughtful exploration of authentic leadership and the importance of knowing what guides you. George challenges leaders to understand their values, purpose, and experiences so they can stay grounded when the path ahead is uncertain.

For Your Next Step: How Women Rise

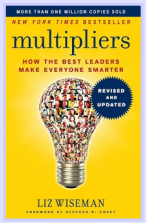
By: *Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith*



A practical look at the habits that can hold women back and the small, intentional changes that can help us move forward in our leadership.

For Helping Others Move Forward: Multipliers

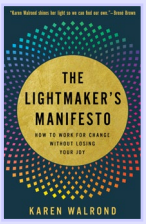
By: *Liz Wiseman*



A powerful exploration of how strong leaders bring out the best in others, create opportunities for people to grow, and multiply the talent around them.

For Sustaining the Journey: The Lightmaker's Manifesto

By: *Karen Walrond*



An encouraging reminder that meaningful leadership and personal well-being do not have to compete. Walrond explores how we can pursue change, lead with purpose, and remain connected to the joy that sustains us along the way.

New Superintendents' Academy

Designed for New Superintendents | Aspiring School Leaders | Chief Administrators Who are New to PA

Act 45 Credits Available for each session.

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PASA's New Superintendents' Academy is a three-part professional learning experience designed specifically for Pennsylvania's newest superintendents. Gain practical strategies and insights to help you navigate the leadership, governance, communication, financial, and operational challenges that come with the role.

> *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

Led by experienced Pennsylvania superintendents and education experts, each session focuses on the issues that matter most in your first year—providing practical guidance you can put to work immediately.

You'll Gain:

- **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

About the Series:

Part 2
November 5-6

Systems Leadership

Developing systems and processes are core to school and student success. This Academy focuses on leadership strategies to develop interconnected, relevant systems that support the district's primary mission of teaching and learning.

Part 3
January 28-29, 2027

Professional & Community Leadership

Professional and community leadership is about establishing a school community in which all learners grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively. This Academy focuses on effective communications and collaborative practices to develop a community of educators in which professional growth is ongoing, to maximize meaningful and mutually beneficial parent and community engagement, and to promote effective advocacy strategies to ensure the future viability of public education.

Stay tuned for our 2027 date for this session!

Strategic & Cultural Leadership

This program will focus on the importance of vision, goals and an empowering culture that promote student and staff growth and working effectively with the school board.

Visit PASA's website to learn more and register.

www.pasa-net.org

Professional Development

Welcome to the 2026-27 School Year: Cultivating Growth, Connection, and Impact Across Pennsylvania

By Dr. Michael Snopkowski
Superintendent
Eastern Lancaster County School District

As we step into the 2026–2027 school year, I want to extend a warm and enthusiastic welcome to all our members and educational leaders across Pennsylvania. Every new academic year brings a renewed sense of purpose, fresh possibilities, and the opportunity to reflect on how we serve our schools.

As chairperson of our statewide professional learning committee, I am honored to stand alongside such a dedicated group of administrators who work continually to serve our communities and elevate public education across our Commonwealth.

The core purpose of the PASA Professional Development Committee is a commitment to robust, high-quality professional learning.

Our work, however, extends far beyond individual growth or earning credits. It is really about the power of networking and building meaningful connections with high-quality administrators from every corner of the state.

When we engage in collaborative learning, we do not simply gain knowledge for ourselves—we return to our organizations equipped to strengthen leadership, refine systems, and enhance outcomes for every child in our classrooms and every community we serve, regardless of our specific administrative roles.

To view upcoming professional learning opportunities, visit PASA's website or check out our calendar of events on Page 25.

Because our Pennsylvania communities vary widely in demographic makeup, size, and available resources, PASA's professional learning is deliberately designed to avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

From small rural districts to large urban systems, our sessions serve as dynamic forums where participants learn and grow directly from one another. Our goal is to empower you with strategies, ideas, and actionable frameworks that can be tailored to respond directly to the unique needs and challenges you face in your local district.

To this end, our sessions are often facilitated by current administrators and colleagues from across the state, sharing learning and experiences in an authentic and actionable manner to help each of us enhance and lead our districts.

To support your ongoing leadership journey, PASA has

assembled an expansive array of learning opportunities for the 26–27 school year. Whether you are engaging in the Superintendents Impact Series, participating in the Assistant Superintendents and Central Office Leaders Summit, or connecting through caucus events like the PASA PLUS or Women's Caucus, there are rich opportunities tailored to every stage and role in leadership.

Above all, I encourage you to set aside time on your calendar for our organization's signature event: the PASA Leadership Forum, taking place from March 31 to April 2, 2027, at The Penn Stater Hotel and Convention Center in State College.

Centered on systems leadership and secondary-level innovation, this flagship conference offers an unmatched environment for learning from peers, networking, and celebrating leadership excellence—starting with our kickoff Awards Program on opening night. Membership pricing has also been adjusted to allow for registration for the Leadership Forum when you pay your annual dues, making attendance easier than ever.

In addition to attending, I strongly encourage you to consider submitting a proposal to present. We want to highlight the incredible, innovative work happening across Pennsylvania districts!

Whether your initiatives are fully implemented or still a work in progress, sharing your journey helps lift up our collective practice and strengthens the support systems for all of our students.

Thank you for your steadfast leadership and dedication. Let's make the 2026–2027 school year our most collaborative, transformative, and impactful year yet. I look forward to learning and growing alongside each of you in the months ahead.

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State News:

Pennsylvania Gov. Shapiro Signs Legislation Guaranteeing 30 Minutes Of Recess To Elementary Students

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro signed a bill Wednesday making recess mandatory for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. In a statement, Shapiro said the recess time will allow elementary school students to "take a break from learning, get outside, and just be kids."

Read the rest of the story: "Pennsylvania Gov. Shapiro Signs Legislation Guaranteeing 30 Minutes Of Recess To Elementary Students" (NPR Pittsburgh, 9-11-26)

Pennsylvania Schools Race to Meet New Reading Mandates Ahead of 2027 Deadline

On the first of September, third graders at Bentworth Elementary School sit down, one by one, with reading specialist Julia Falvo to read three short stories aloud. Falvo marks down each word students struggle with, then asks them to summarize each passage from memory. After students leave the room, she tallies the scores, scanning for patterns.

Read the rest of the story: "Pennsylvania Schools Race to Meet New Reading Mandates Ahead of 2027 Deadline" (Pennlive, 9-9-26)

Youth Vaping Is Declining. Central PA Schools Are Seeing The Trend, Too

The rate of middle and high school students who vape is declining across the United States, with Central Pennsylvanian districts and experts seeing similar trends. Nicotine vape use among middle and high school students fell to 5.2% in 2025, the lowest rate since the behavior peaked in 2019, according to the 2025 National Youth Tobacco Survey by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Six years ago, 27.5% of high school students and 10.5% of middle school students reported use.

Read the rest of the story: "Youth Vaping Is Declining. Central PA Schools Are Seeing The Trend, Too" (Pennlive, 9-9-26)

Trade Schools See Enrollment Bumps As Students Worry About AI, Job Security In White-Collar Work

When Dennis Wilke took the helm of Rosedale Technical College 21 years ago, the Kennedy Township school offered three programs and enrolled primarily lower-income students. The college has since added six new programs, all of which are in high demand and growing. This past school year, Rosedale Tech reported its highest enrollment to date.

Read the rest of the story: "Trade Schools See Enrollment Bumps As Students Worry About AI, Job Security In White-Collar Work" (Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, 9-13-26)

This Educator Just Gave Away His 5 Millionth Book—And Will Give Away Thousands To Philly And N.J. Teachers This Year

Inside a cavernous warehouse just off I-295 in Cherry Hill, Larry Abrams spread his arms, gesturing to the sea of industrial-size cardboard boxes that surrounded him.

"We're sitting on a rocket ship," said Abrams, a third-generation teacher. Abrams' rocket ship is composed of books: thousands and thousands of them — picture books and out-of-date science textbooks, cookbooks and battered novels. He sees them as a way to change kids' life trajectories.

Read the rest of the story: "This Educator Just Gave Away His 5 Millionth Book—And Will Give Away Thousands To Philly And N.J. Teachers This Year" (The Philadelphia Inquirer, 8-29-26)

National News:

Why 'Portrait of a Graduate' Initiatives Struggle to Transform Instruction

Many states and school districts are developing and adopting "portrait of a graduate" documents that outline the key skills, attributes, and mindsets that students should develop by graduation. At least 26 states have a portrait of a graduate or outline guidance for districts to create their own, according to a 2026 report from America Succeeds, a nonprofit focused on education and workforce development. But are those portraits influencing changes in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development for teachers to help students develop these skills?

Read the rest of the story: "Why 'Portrait of a Graduate' Initiatives Struggle to Transform Instruction" (EducationWeek, 9-16-26)

From Learning to Doing: Putting the Science of Reading Into Practice

Something wasn't adding up in Davidson County Schools. Students were making strong gains in reading in kindergarten and first grade. They were developing foundational skills and, for the most part, reading accurately. But as students moved across second and third grades, growth became stagnant and the end-of-grade reading proficiency began to decline. After taking a deep dive into the data, district leaders discovered that the challenge wasn't necessarily whether students could read the words in front of them. In fact, many could. The concern was fluency and automaticity. Students weren't reading at a pace and with the ease needed to devote their attention to understanding what they were reading.

Read the rest of the story: "From Learning to Doing: Putting the Science of Reading Into Practice" (The74, 9-16-26)

To Get Past AI Hype, Researchers Watch Students Use Actual Tools in Class

Like most of us, Emily Freitag hears a lot about generative artificial intelligence in the classroom. Much of it seems like the typical ed-tech hype. Co-founder and CEO of Instruction Partners, a Nashville-based nonprofit that works with teachers to provide high-quality resources and instructional support, she got curious about AI after seeing the tool Coursemojo in action.

Read the rest of the story: "To Get Past AI Hype, Researchers Watch Students Use Actual Tools in Class" (The 74, 9-17-26)

Report: How Gen-Z Views School And What A Sense Of Belonging Means To Them

When a 20-year-old New Yorker recently reflected on her high school experience, she said the things she learned weren't "very helpful to where I am now." I don't really think most of my classes that I took in high school I have in my brain anymore," she told researchers who authored the Voices of Gen Z Study, an annual report conducted by Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation about Gen-Z's attitude toward school and life after high school. What stuck with her, however, were the teachers that "made an impact," and who she maintains relationships with years later.

Read the rest of the story: "Report: How Gen-Z Views School And What A Sense Of Belonging Means To Them" (EducationWeek, 9-11-26)

USDA Urged To Report How SNAP Cuts Impact Free School Meals

An Illinois congressman on Thursday pressed the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its Food and Nutrition Administration to provide a state-by-state assessment of the impact the One Big Beautiful Bill Act's cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are having on students' access to free school meals nationwide. The Republican-led OBBBA, which went into effect in July 2025, made historic cuts to SNAP and imposed new eligibility and work requirements for the federal program, said Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., in a letter to USDA leadership.

Read the rest of the story: "USDA Urged To Report How SNAP Cuts Impact Free School Meals" (K-12 Dive, 9-1-26)

PLUS Caucus

Be the Crucible:
Transforming High-Heat Conflict into Lasting Community Progress

Mr. Stephen Rodriguez
Superintendent, Pottstown Area School District
Secretary, PLUS Caucus

As school leaders, summer offers a brief, sacred window to step back, recharge, and prepare for the upcoming academic year. Like many of you, I use this time to catch up on professional reading that might offer a fresh perspective on the work ahead.

This summer, a single illustration from Susan Scott's Fierce Conversations stayed with me. Scott references the concept of a crucible. Now, full transparency: for years, my primary association with that word was Arthur Miller's famous high school English staple—a classic masterpiece that many of us politely skimmed or relied on SparkNotes to pass.

In metallurgy, however, a crucible is something entirely practical and extraordinary. It is a specialized, heat-resistant container—often crafted from dense graphite—engineered to withstand searing temperatures. Its purpose isn't to create heat, nor to burn. Its job is to hold molten metal, remaining completely stable while containment allows dangerous, highly volatile liquid to be safely poured into a mold, shaping it into something functional, durable, and permanent.

Scott uses this image as a powerful model for executive leadership, and it resonates deeply with the reality of leading public school systems today. For public school superintendents—particularly those navigating Pennsylvania's diverse, high-density urban districts—the environment can routinely reach a boiling point. Urban leadership places us at the intersection of passionate community voices, complex fiscal realities, high-stakes accountability, and deep-seated political debates. On any given evening, a board room or community forum can feel less like a policy workshop and more like a blast furnace.

In those high-friction moments, the natural human instinct is to react to the temperature in the room—to match the heat and inadvertently become the volatile liquid ourselves. But true, transformative leadership calls us to do something far more demanding: to be the crucible.

Being the crucible means cultivating the internal discipline to remain level-headed, cool, and structurally sound when the environment around us is red-hot. It means creating a grounded space where intense emotions, urgent concerns, and conflicting perspectives are contained rather than amplified. As urban superintendents, our role is not to extinguish the community's fire, nor is it to ignite our own. It is to take that immense, unrefined energy, absorb the pressure without cracking, and thoughtfully direct it into practical solutions, equitable policy, and sustainable achievements for our students.

Join our next PLUS Caucus Meeting:
October 15 at Noon via Zoom.
Contact PASA for more details: pasa@pasa-net.org

It is unapologetically hard work. Maintaining that kind of emotional composure requires deliberate self-care, strong professional networks, and continuous personal reflection.

But it is also the defining trait of a resilient community leader. As we launch into this new school year, high-temperature situations will inevitably arise. When they do, remember: containers do not fear the heat—they master it.

By remaining the steady, resolute vessels our districts need, we turn temporary volatility into the permanent foundation our schools and students deserve.

Did you know:

PASA provides legal services to Commission Officers:

- Employment contract services
- Negotiation and development of separation agreements
- Non-litigation dispute resolution
- Employment-related consulting services

Contact us today:

Contact PASA's General Counsel Robert Tomaine at 717-503-3704 or via email at rtomaine@pasa-net.org.

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:

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- 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:

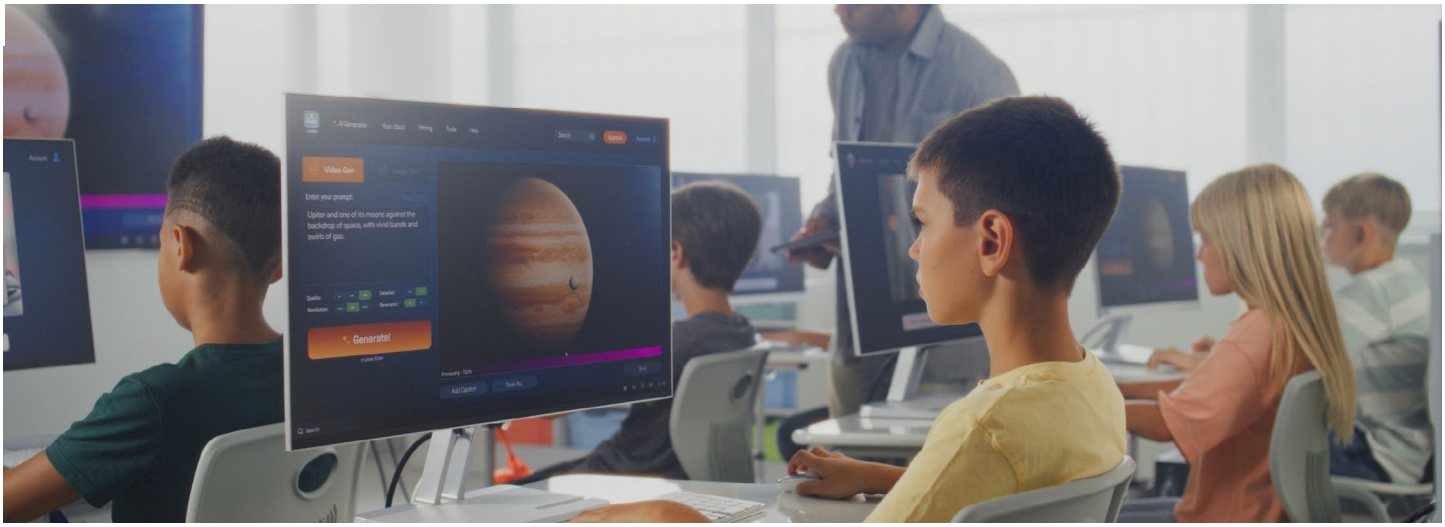
Comprehensive: 12 months of in-depth, ongoing support
Consolidated: Focused coaching over 6 or 12 months
Customized: Ala carte support; Project-based and tailored to your district priorities

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

PASA

USED Releases Guidance on Ed Tech in Schools and Annual Update on FERPA and PPRA

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



The USED recently released non-binding guidance on Responsible Use of Education Technology in the Classroom.

A review of the guidance finds it to be measured, consistent with current practice and not likely to be of major consequence to schools. Non-binding guidance means it is a resource that can be taken under consideration but for which there is no mechanism of enforcement.

The guidance encourages SEAs, LEAs, educators, families, and education technology providers to take a more intentional, evidence-based approach to technology use in classrooms.

The guidance emphasizes that technology decisions should prioritize instructional value and student learning outcomes rather than recreational engagement or simply increasing screen time. It calls on districts to select tools with demonstrated effectiveness, regularly evaluate their impact, provide educator training, and ensure transparency around how technology is used and how student data is handled.

The guidance encourages providers to minimize unnecessary screen time and build tools that strengthen instruction and are supported by evidence.

Importantly, the guidance suggests that schools should be willing to discontinue technology tools that do not demonstrate meaningful benefits for student learning.

For school leaders, the guidance offers five key questions to consider: What learning problem does the tool solve, when and for whom should it be used, for how long, and what evidence shows that it improves student learning?

The guidance appropriately affirms that these decisions are the purview of state and local education agencies, and that not all screen time is created equal

Privacy Update: USED sent state and local education agencies their annual notice of obligations under the

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA).

In this year's Dear Colleague letter, there is more focus on PPRA than there was last year, and the cover letter changes PPRA interpretation to require parental opt-in for all surveys addressing one of the eight protected categories of information (before this letter, the standard for optional surveys was opt-out).

There are other notable aspects as well, including the mention that schools may want to consult their attorneys about developing policies around the use of personal devices and edtech to protect students consistent with or in the absence of state law.

Given increased interest from the administration in using FERPA for enforcement on districts, AASA advocacy is paying close attention to any communication in this privacy policy space and will continue to update members on the blog.

Background: FERPA and PPRA are federal privacy laws enforced by the Department's SPPO. FERPA protects the privacy of students' education records and safeguards parents' rights to access their children's education records, seek amendments to those records, and exercise control over the disclosure of personally identifiable information.

PPRA requires school administers to provide an opt-out opportunity to families when deploying surveys or evaluations asking students for certain sensitive and private information.

In the September Issue of School Administrator Magazine:

This issue examines the shift to a civic leadership role in the superintendency.

Articles include: A New Leadership Paradigm: Superintendent as Civic Leader; The Power of Listening; Communicating Across Difference; An Asset-Based Perspective of Leading in Small Towns; Disparate Treatment of Female Superintendents; From Rule-Based Decision-Making to Dilemma-Oriented Leadership and more.

Quotes:

"We often have that one person who just seems to make everything work, but what happens when they're gone? Sometimes, you quickly discover just how many invisible systems they've quietly been holding together all along."

–Jane Stavem, Deputy Commissioner, Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln, Neb. in "When Your Right-Hand Person Is Somewhere Without Cell Service"

"One challenge for leaders is that honest feedback gets filtered. Comments that could help us often are softened, delayed or avoided altogether. Sometimes our teams are just trying to preserve a positive working relationship or are unsure how we will respond."

– Lance Gibbon, Superintendent, Hood Canal School District, Skokomish, Wash. in "Looking in the Mirror: AI as Leadership Coach"

"Instructional leadership, when done through a civic leadership lens, is no longer just about designing strategies that move test scores but about visioning in ways that connect to a community's deepest values and broadest aspirations. It is about helping people see teaching and learning not as a technocratic exercise but as the means by which we prepare young people to participate in and improve their communities."

–Jennifer Cheatham, Former Superintendent and Senior Lecturer and Faculty Chair of the Initiative on Superintendent as Civic Leader at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Mass., in "A New Leadership Paradigm: Superintendent as Civic Leader"

"A superintendent's opportunity is to open the system in ways contituents can see and feel--and that means expanding the tent beyond the usual participants and listening more attentively for shared values."

–Caitlin Sullivan, CEO and Co-Founder of Leading Now, Providence, R.I. in "The Power of Listening"

Writing Out Loud

Moving From "Look What We Did" to Here's Why It Matters"

By Adam Kulikowski
Director of Communications, PASA

Good news is happening in your school district every day.

Students win awards. Teachers receive recognition. New programs and innovative learning strategies launch. Construction projects are completed. An athletic team wins a big game.

The list can go on and on.

But effective communication isn't simply about telling people what happened. It's about helping them understand why it matters.

Reframing your focus to explain the why can have a profound impact on the way your district's story is received by your school community.

For example:

Consider a typical social media post:

"Congratulations to our robotics team for placing first in this weekend's competition!"

Sure. We're excited that the team won first place. But that's all we learned in the post.

But if we added a little context, we have a much greater understanding of the why.

"Congratulations to our robotics team for placing first in this weekend's competition! After months of designing, testing and problem-solving, our students put their teamwork and engineering skills to the test. Their success is a great example of how hands-on learning helps students apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world challenges."

The trophy is still highlighted—who doesn't like to see their district hoist trophies?! But now the audience understands something more, what the experience meant for students.

That's the difference between reporting an accomplishment and communicating its impact.

As school leaders, we have countless opportunities to connect everyday accomplishments to the larger goals of our districts.

Launching a new literacy initiative? Don't just explain what you're changing. Explain the need (why) behind the change and what you hope it will mean for students.

Opening a new athletic facility? Don't just showcase the finished product. Explain how the investment supports students and the broader school community.

Celebrating a teacher? Don't just share the award. Tell the story of how that educator is making a difference for students.

Sharing assessment data? Don't simply publish the numbers. Help your community understand what they mean and how the district is responding.

In an environment where school districts are constantly communicating with families, staff and community members, there is an abundance of information.

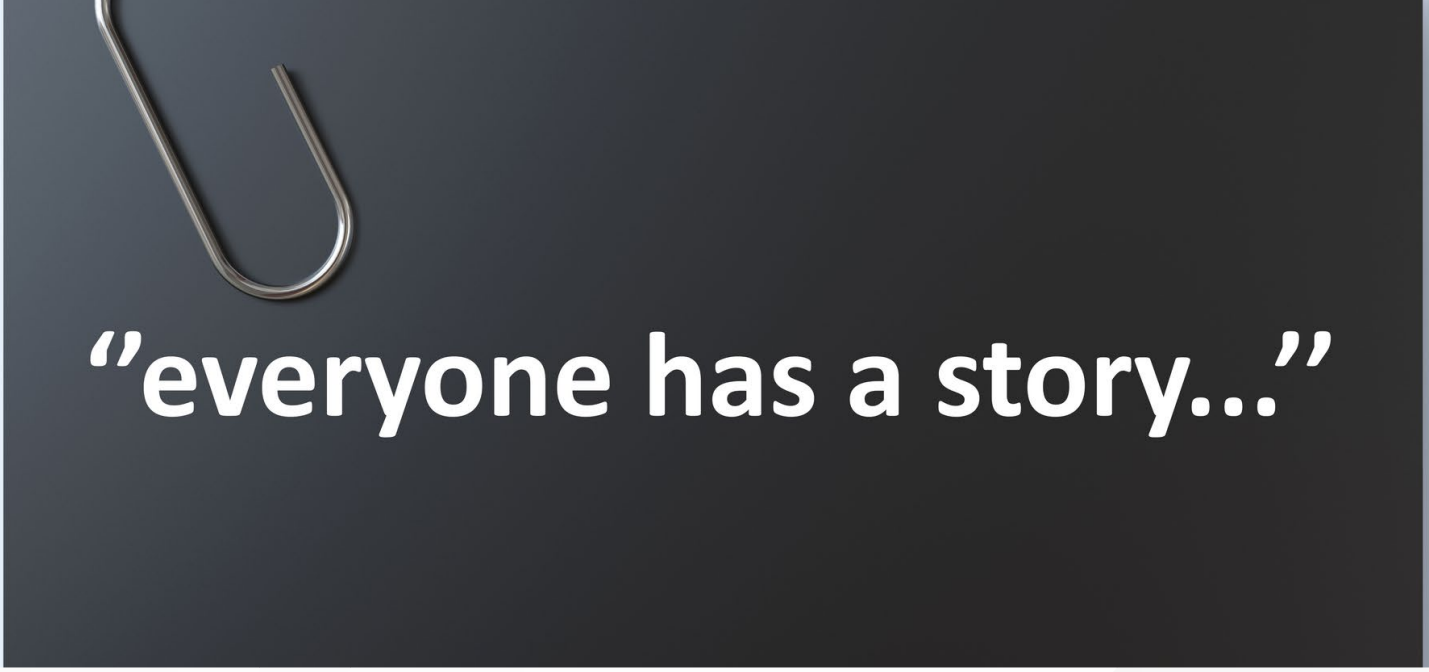
What people need from their leaders isn't necessarily more information.

They need context.

They need to understand why a decision was made, how an investment benefits students and how today's work connects to tomorrow's goals.

That doesn't require a 500-word explanation every time. Sometimes the most powerful addition to a communication is a single sentence that answers the question: "Why should I care?"

Because when we communicate the why behind our work, we're doing more than sharing news. We're helping our communities understand our priorities, see the impact of their schools and connect today's accomplishments to the future we're building together.



It's time to tell *your* story of innovation and creativity!

Topics we're looking for:

- Teaching and Learning
- School Operations and Management
- Finance and Business Practices
- Leadership and Culture

Why Share?

- Spotlight your district's success
- Inspire other leaders with replicable models
- Build a statewide network of innovative practices
- Gain recognition through PASA Communications and events

Scan the QR Code to share your story with PASA's Innovative Teaching and Learning Committee!

PASA

By Ann McMullan
Project Director, CoSN

CoSN Blog Posts – Open to All

Among the valuable and free resources that CoSN offers are the Blog Posts that are published on the CoSN website at https://www.cosn.org/news-publications/blogs/. Readers of the blog posts will find insight and guidance on a wide variety of topics related to leading technology innovation.

Highlights of recent freely accessible postings on the CoSN Blog Post website include:

1) *"Speak Your Crazy: School District of La Crosse, WI"* by Dr. Stacy Hawthorne, CoSN Board Chair. In this post, Dr. Hawthorne describes the thinking behind the innovative design of La Crosse Polytechnic School in the School District of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

2) *"Mobilizing Your District: How School Leaders Can Rally Communities to Save E-Rate Funding"*. Readers of this blog post will learn strategies for coordinating efforts across school district stakeholder groups to build support to advocate for the continuation of E-Rate funding to school districts.

3) *"Supportive Environments in K-12 Cybersecurity"*. This article acknowledges that we all share a responsibility for cybersecurity in our school settings. To help all districts build a strong culture for this shared works, three specific steps for changing the culture to meet that shared responsibility are outlined.

Season 9 of the CoSN/AASA EmpowerED Superintendents edLeader Panel Broadcasts

On Monday, September 14, 2026, edWeb.net launched Season 9 of the CoSN/AASA EmpowerED Superintendents edLeader Panel Broadcasts. The focus of the September 14 broadcast was on "Leading and Sustaining Technology Innovations in Today's School District Settings". If you missed the live broadcast, you are welcome to view the recording which can be freely accessed at https://home.edweb.net/webinar/supers20260914/.

The October 5, 2026, edLeader Panel Broadcast will focus on "Current Education Technology Hurdles, Accelerators, and Enablers: CoSN's 2026 Driving K-12 Innovation Report". Featured panelists include Dr. Doug Brubaker, Superintendent, Chesapeake Public Schools, Virginia, Dr. Karen Cheser, Superintendent, Durango School District, Colorado and Superintendent Glenn Robbins, Brigantine Public School District, New Jersey. The superintendents on the panel will be joined by Laura Geringer, Project Director for CoSN's Driving K-12 Innovation Initiative and EdTech Innovation Committee. Registration for the free October 5, 2026, edLeader Panel is open at https://home.edweb.net/webinar/supers20261005/. After the live broadcast, a recording of the October 5, 2026, broadcast will also be freely available at that same URL address.

Support for Continuing the E-Rate Program

The FCC is expected to rule on whether to continue current funding for E-Rate in mid-October. CoSN encourages school leaders to submit their rationale for support of E-Rate and is happy to provide a free guide for Filing E-rate Comments with the FCC at

https://www.cosn.org/tools-and-resources/resource/cosns-guide-to-filing-e-rate-comments-with-the-fcc/.

Comments should be submitted to the FCC by no later than October 13, 2026.

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

September 29-30	**Superintendent Impact Series:** *Assessing the Educational Landscape and Identifying Systems and Processes*
October 14-15	**Assistant Superintendents and Central Office Leaders' Summit** *From Framework to Practice: Leadership in Action*
October 18-20	**PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference:** *Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in the Poconos*
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*
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*