



January 21, 2016

*The Senate was in session this week; the House of Representatives was not. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, Jan. 25.*

## PSBA Victory

### **Bill to "push pause" on graduation requirements will go to Gov. Wolf**

This week the Senate concurred in House amendments to [Senate Bill 880](#) (Sen. Smucker, R- Lancaster), legislation supported by PSBA that creates a two-year delay in the implementation of the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement or a benchmark for the need for participation in a project-based assessment (PBA) until 2019. The bill now will be presented to Gov. Wolf, who is expected to sign the measure.

Senate Bill 880 also requires the PA Department of Education to investigate alternatives to the use of the Keystone Exams as a requirement for graduation and issue a report to the House and Senate Education Committees of its findings and recommendations, including proposed legislation. The report must contain a plan to: 1) implement alternative methods to demonstrate proficiency for graduation in addition to the Keystone Exams and PBAs; 2) improve and expedite the evaluation of PBAs; and 3) ensure that no student is prohibited from participating in vocational-technical education or elective courses as a result of taking required supplemental instruction. The report is due within six months of the effective date of the bill.

PSBA has continued to urge legislators to "push pause" on the use of Keystone Exams as graduation requirements for a number of reasons that were outlined in [a letter of support for Senate Bill 880](#) sent to the Senate this week. The association thanks members of the General Assembly for passing the bill and notes that it was unanimously approved in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. PSBA also thanks the many local school officials who contacted their legislators seeking support of the measure.

Sen. Smucker, the bill's sponsor and Chairman of the Senate Education Committee said, "While I strongly believe in holding schools accountable and ensuring that our high school graduates are career- and college-ready, parents and schools have raised many concerns about the implementation of these exams. It is time to push the pause button on the timetable for phase-in and work through the honest concerns raised by parents, students and educators." As an example of two areas in need of review, Smucker referred specifically to the project-based assessments, as well as the impact of assessments on career and technical students.

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## Senate passes emergency day flexibility, criminal history report bill

This week the Senate passed legislation that addresses two issues that have been raised by PSBA. The association supports the provisions of [House Bill 158](#) (Rep. Peifer, R-Pike) as amended this week and unanimously passed by the Senate. The bill now returns to the House for concurrence.

As originally introduced, House Bill 158 amends the School Code to allow the secretary of education to issue weather, safety or health related emergency declarations under which school entities can be given additional flexibility to satisfy the 180 instructional days per school year requirement. The bill would allow a school board to approve a school year with a minimum of 900 hours of instruction at the elementary level and 990 hours of instruction at the secondary level in lieu of 180 days, or to schedule additional instructional days of not more than one Saturday per month to complete the minimum hour or day requirements.

This week the bill was amended on the Senate floor to align provisions in the School Code regarding background checks with changes to the Child Protective Services Law under Act 15 of 2015. Despite the new portability and five-year renewal provisions in Act 15, Section 111 of the School Code still requires that state and federal criminal history reports submitted by prospective employees be no more than one year old. House Bill 158 amends Section 111 to contain the same five-year provisions.

PSBA was seeking passage of both of the issues addressed in House Bill 158. The emergency declaration provisions give districts the ongoing ability to make the necessary schedule adjustments to meet instructional requirements in the event of unforeseen closures. Last year, PSBA was actively involved in the development of the changes to the Child Protective Services Law because school employees are covered by both that act and the School Code. The association had continued to point out the issue of nonalignment between Act 15 and the School Code, and is pleased to see it addressed.



## Education Secretary Rivera to discuss budget with PSBA members

On **Feb. 12** at noon, PSBA members are invited to an exclusive webinar with state **Education Secretary Pedro Rivera** and PSBA Assistant Executive Director of Public Policy John Callahan as they discuss the proposed 2016-17 state budget that will be unveiled by Gov. Wolf on Feb. 9. Participants will also learn about issues impacting public education related to the budget impasse and the recent release of emergency funding to school districts during this live, complimentary members-only webinar.

**Click here for more details and to register [online](#)**

## Latest News

### 2015-16 State Budget Update

- [Senate takes no action on Fiscal Code bill](#)

### Senate Committee Action

- [Passed by the Senate Education Committee](#)

### Other News

- [Sen. Aument joins Senate Education Committee](#)

## 2015-16 State Budget Update

### Senate takes no action on Fiscal Code bill

No action was taken by the Senate this week to move [House Bill 1327](#), legislation passed by the House of Representatives last week that would amend the Fiscal Code to implement the 2015-16 partial state budget as enacted last month. The bill remains in the Senate Rules Committee and its future in the Senate, or with Gov. Wolf, is uncertain as no consensus has been reached regarding the language in the bill or to finish a spending plan.

The bill passed by the House made various changes to the budget, including significant adjustments for the distribution of the basic education subsidy and Ready to Learn block grants. House Bill 1327 changes the distribution of the basic subsidy so that districts would receive an amount to last year's appropriation and any new dollars would be allocated using the formula recommended by the Basic Education Funding Commission. House Bill 1327 also changed the distribution of the Ready to Learn (RTL) block grants by re-stating that the money will be distributed as it was last year to both school districts *and* charter schools.

Meanwhile, the state has already distributed emergency funding to school districts using what the Wolf Administration called "components consistent with the proposed formula in the 2015-16 Executive Budget, and are part of the agreed-to hybrid funding formula that would have been fully enacted as part of the bipartisan framework budget agreement." Additionally, districts received the same RTL grant amount they received in 2014-15 and remaining funds were used to restore the charter school reimbursement program that had been eliminated in the 2011-12 budget.

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## Senate Committee Action

### Passed by the Senate Education Committee

**Reciprocity for Postsecondary Distance Education -- [House Bill 1552](#)** (Rep. Roae, R-Crawford) authorizes Pennsylvania to join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), a nationwide initiative to coordinate state authorization requirements for postsecondary distance education providers. It is intended to make it easier for students to take online courses offered by postsecondary institutions based in another state. The PA Department of Education may charge administrative fees to institutions of higher education that choose to participate in the agreement. The bill is now in the Senate Appropriations Committee for further consideration.

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## Other News

### Sen. Aument joins Senate Education Committee

This week Sen. Ryan Aument (R -Lancaster) was appointed as a member of the Senate Education Committee, filling the vacancy created by the departure of Sen. Dominic Pileggi, who recently was elected to the Delaware County Court of Common Pleas.

In a prepared statement, Aument said the Education Committee is "an excellent place to shape policies that we need to promote the success of the next generation of young people." He also noted that there is no shortage of issues facing education.

"Whether it is finding ways to meet the needs of public schools so they can succeed or creating additional opportunities for students and families, I look forward to advancing proven education policies that put parents and students first. Far too often the debate in education has focused solely on how much we spend - I want to partner with parents, educators and others who want to transform our current system into a world-class model of success," Aument said

Sen. Aument previously served on the House Education Committee.

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