



February 19, 2016

The Senate and House of Representatives are adjourned until March 14 as the Senate and House Appropriations Committees convene hearings on specific components of Gov. Wolf's budget proposal. On Tuesday, March 8, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will meet separately with the Department of Education.

PSBA Victory

New Act 4 addresses emergency day flexibility, criminal history reports

This week Gov. Tom Wolf signed into law [House Bill 158](#) (Rep. Peifer, R-Pike), now **Act 4 of 2016**, legislation that addresses two issues that have been raised by PSBA.

Act 4 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.

In addition, Act 4 aligns 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 required that state and federal criminal history reports submitted by prospective employees be no more than one year old. Act 4 amends Section 111 to contain the same five-year provisions.

PSBA was seeking passage of both of the issues addressed in Act 4. 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.



PSBA's new Closer Look report calls for changes to improve truancy laws
 With student absenteeism and truancy a genuine and continuing concern for school districts across Pennsylvania, PSBA believes that now is the time for the General Assembly to take action to address the problem. This week the association released a new report with recommendations for improvements in various provisions of state law and policy.

Click here to read PSBA's new [Closer Look](#) report on truancy.

PSBA has been actively involved as a member of the Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup, created by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and also as a member of the Joint State Government Commission's Truancy Advisory Committee. The *Closer Look* report emphasizes that a "one-size fits all" approach to truancy may not be an effective way to deal with absenteeism within a particular school district. While many school districts have common challenges, it is critical to recognize that differing factors may determine what methods may be most effective within an individual district. The report addresses issues related to enforcement and fines, clearer definitions of terms in the law related to habitual truancy and unexcused absences, and the need for collaborative approaches and strategies based on the child and family situation.



How late is the full 2015-16 budget?



Days until the 2016-17 budget must pass:



PSBA budget clocks tick up and down for 2015-16 and 2016-17 budgets

With the beginning of the 2016-17 state budget season now blended into the unfinished business of 2015-16, Pennsylvania's missed and upcoming budget deadlines are woefully evident to school districts that are operating with a combination of the partial "emergency" state funding that was distributed in last month and local resources.

The problems for districts are compounded by the fact that at the same time that they are unsure of what additional funding they will receive for the remainder of the current 2015-16

school year, they are required to be developing their 2016-17 budgets between now and June 30.

Certainly this budget season is far from the normal course of business, as the budget clocks clearly indicate. Districts have made difficult decisions and will continue to do so until both budgets are resolved.

[Check out PSBA's Budget Clocks that feature a new "Count Down" to the 2016-17 budget alongside the existing "Count Up" clock keeping track of how late the 2015-16 budget is.](#)

ESSA Update

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ESSA Update

PSBA launches study group to recommend reform changes under ESSA

PSBA has established a study group of stakeholders to provide recommendations to the PA Department of Education and General Assembly that address four areas of reform opportunities under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act. The group will meet early next month, and issue a report with its recommendations this spring.

While the new ESSA framework becomes effective in 2017-18, all state waivers will expire by Aug. 1, 2016 and states must submit a new implementation plan at that time to allow time for review by the U.S. Department of Education.

The PSBA study group will examine four subject areas addressed by the ESSA: high stakes testing/assessments/accountability, comprehensive support and improvement, teacher quality, and charter schools. [Click here to read more details on these subject areas.](#)

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State News

State Policy Secretary John Hanger resigns

This week the Wolf Administration announced that secretary of policy and planning, John Hanger, has left the administration to spend more time with his family, who currently reside in Worcester, Massachusetts. Gov. Wolf has named Sarah Galbally the secretary of policy and planning. Sarah currently serves as the deputy secretary for policy and planning.

In addition, Governor Wolf also announced that Will Danowski, who currently is serving as acting secretary of legislative affairs, will now serve in the role permanently.

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School districts invited to apply for state Alternative Fuels Incentive Grant

This week the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Office of Pollution Prevention and Energy Assistance is inviting school districts to apply for

grants under the Alternative Fuels Incentive Grant (AFIG) Program. Approximately \$7 million in grants will be available for school districts, municipal authorities, political subdivisions, and others to support cost expenses relative to retrofitting vehicles to operate on alternative fuels, and reimbursement incentives for school districts and other entities who purchase and use biofuel blends including e-85 and biodiesel blends of 5% biofuel content and higher.

The application period will open on Feb. 20 and remain open throughout 2016. Applications must be made online through the eGrants system. DEP will collect and review applications received by April 29, Aug. 26, and Dec. 30, 2016. Hardcopy applications will not be accepted.

To further assist potential applicants, DEP is hosting two webinars on March 7 from 1:00-2:00 p.m. and on March 8 from 11:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. to review key items for this grant opportunity.

[Click here for detailed information about the grant program guidelines, links to applications, and to register for the March information webinars.](#)

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