



**March 19, 2015**

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PSBA Legislative Report

*The General Assembly was not in session this week as the Senate and House Appropriations Committees continue budget hearings. The House is adjourned until Monday, March 30. The Senate will return on Monday, April 13.*

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#### **Top Stories**

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#### **Wolf Administration Asks Districts to Submit Plans for New State Funds; Senate, House Republican Leaders Voice Concerns**

This week Acting Secretary of Education Pedro Rivera sent a letter to superintendents detailing new accountability measures connected to proposed increases in basic education funding under Gov. Wolf's 2015-16 budget, and called for school districts to submit their plans for the use of the funds. Districts are asked to submit their plans to the PA Department of Education (PDE) by May 15, with PDE review and feedback by June 15 or within 15 days of a plan's submission, whichever is later.

In the letter, the secretary explained that the governor's plan includes two accountability measures for the use of new resources. Districts will be required to use the portion of their Basic Education Funding increase that exceeds the inflation-based index for their choice of evidence-based programs as well as to restore cuts to programs and personnel that school districts were forced to make as a result of state budget cuts. The letter contains a list of options in 14 broad areas. In addition, the proposal requires districts to select relevant benchmarks to measure student performance and progress. [Here is the full text of the letter.](#) This plan has been drafted as part of the package of bills recently released by the governor's office, and is included in the

## [Omnibus Legislation Enacting Education Spending.](#)

In response, PSBA issued a [statement](#) noting that focusing financial resources on the classroom is critical to student achievement and is where the majority of school spending should be directed. The association also said that the next step is to eliminate and reduce unfunded mandates that overburden school entities so that they can place more resources in the classroom.

Republican leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives have separately raised concerns with the new requirement. Senate President Pro Tempore Joe Scarnati, Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman, Senate Appropriations Chairman Pat Browne, Senate Majority Whip John Gordner and Senate Education Committee Chairman Lloyd Smucker issued a [statement](#) opposing the requirement as premature since a new state budget has not been adopted. Last week Senate leaders sent a letter to superintendents advising them to be fiscally conservative as their district budgets for next year are being drafted. Speaker of the House Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny County) and House Majority Leader Dave Reed (R-Indiana County) sent a [letter to Gov. Wolf](#) questioning his authority to mandate school districts to expend time and resources on a plan to spend what is, thus far, an unfunded budget proposal.

### **House Appropriations Committee Discusses Education Budget**

As budget hearings continue this week, the House Appropriations Committee met with Acting Education Secretary Pedro Rivera to discuss the governor's 2015-16 spending plan for education. Rivera explained components of the proposed budget, including funding for basic and special education, career and technical education, and changes related to charter and cyber charter school funds.

Committee members focused most questions and comments on issues related to basic education funding formula and distribution changes. Legislators also said that cost controls and oversight must be created if funding is increased. Other areas of discussion included the value of early childhood education programs and the need to increase job readiness.

Areas of concern to the legislators included the impact of the governor's tax reform plan, and the need to address meaningful pension reform. Rivera was questioned on the administration's position on school construction issues (PlanCon) and he indicated that the issue will be considered. In addition, the need for mandate relief was discussed, and Rivera said that the administration is committed to looking at state mandates for relief options.

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## **Latest News**

### **PSBA Supports Legislation to Allow Furloughs Based on District Needs**

PSBA supports legislation being proposed by Sen. Ryan Aument and Rep. Stephen Bloom that would provide school districts flexibility in managing its professional staff. Currently, school districts may not reduce staff due to economic reasons. Instead, districts may not take budgets into consideration, but can only reduce professional staff by eliminating entire programs or if student population significantly decreases.

The proposed legislation, under **Senate Bill 5** and **House Bill 806**, would allow districts to take economic factors into consideration and also allow for the furlough of teachers according to the needs of the district. Currently, staff reductions must be handled on seniority basis or "last in, first out." (As this report is filed, the bills are not yet available.)

"While the decision to reduce staff is certainly not taken lightly and is often a last resort for school districts, where reductions in personnel expenditures are necessary, they must be done in a rational, measured and

efficient manner through the use of entirely objective criteria where seniority is not the determining factor,” said PSBA Executive Director Nathan Mains. “The students of our public schools deserve the best quality teachers instructing them and school districts should not be forced to furlough teachers strictly based on seniority.”

The General Assembly often urges school leaders to operate their districts more efficiently. Current law does not give school districts the appropriate tools to effectively manage their workforce. In the business world, a decline in existing revenue, required expenditure increases, and limited flexibility to raise new revenue would result in looking for immediate savings through personnel reductions. The proposed legislation will give districts the tool they need to better manage their limited personnel and financial resources.

### **PSBA Provides Information During Budget Season**

As the budget season gathers momentum, PSBA is actively working to provide information to the public and legislators on funding issues and the needs of school districts. This week PSBA participated as a panelist on Education Policy and Law Center’s (EPLC) Education Policy Forum on Gov. Wolf’s Proposed Education Budget for 2015-16. Representing PSBA at the event was the association’s Senior Director of Government Affairs John Callahan, who discussed budget needs from the school board perspective.

Additionally, PSBA recently sent to all legislators a [brochure](#) to help them better understand school district budgeting requirements and limitations under the law. The brochure includes a detailed explanation of the legally-mandated procedures and deadlines, which coincides with the state final budget deadline of June 30. PSBA also sent all legislators a copy of the [2015 Legislative Platform](#), which contains the association’s positions on funding, charter and pension reforms, and other key issues.

### **School Boards Invited to Submit Proposals for the 2016 Legislative Platform**

PSBA is now inviting your school board to submit proposals to be considered for the association’s 2016 Legislative Platform. This is your board’s opportunity to have a say in the positions that PSBA takes to the Capitol on behalf of its members. The platform is PSBA’s official record of positions on legislative issues and is the guide for the association’s advocacy efforts.

The deadline for school boards to submit items for consideration is **Tuesday, June 30**. It is not too early to bring this issue up for discussion at your next board meeting so that your items can be drafted, approved and submitted to PSBA by the deadline. As a reminder, school boards should focus on the section of the PSBA Platform containing the Core Legislative Principles and Supporting Concepts. The four Core Legislative Principles provide the broad policy framework for the platform, and the Supporting Concepts describe in more detail PSBA’s position on legislative issues that are related to each of the Core Legislative Principles.

All proposals will be reviewed by the PSBA Platform Committee on **Saturday, Aug. 8** and receive final consideration by the PSBA Delegate Assembly on **Tuesday, Oct. 13** in conjunction with the School Leadership Conference in Hershey. [Click here for guidelines on how to submit a platform item.](#) [Click here to read PSBA’s 2015 Legislative Platform.](#)

### **On the Hill: Upcoming Meetings**

*Upcoming events currently scheduled include:*

#### **Monday, March 23**

\* The **Senate and House Appropriations Committees** will conduct separate hearings with the Public School Employees Retirement System.

\* The **House Democratic Policy Committee** will conduct a public hearing in Erie to discuss education

funding.

**Tuesday, March 24**

\* The **House State Government Committee** will conduct a public hearing on pension reform.

**Thursday, March 26**

\* The **PA Chamber of Business and Industry** and the **PA NewsMedia Association Foundation** will be hosting the first of three planned informational public town hall meeting on pension reform. The town hall will include a presentation from the Independent Fiscal Office, which will provide an overview of the current pension systems and the impact the unfunded liability has on the state's fiscal stability. A panel discussion on how pension reform would impact taxpayers will follow the IFO presentation. **PSBA will be a panel participant and will be represented by Ephrata Area School Director Tim Stayer.** The event will be held 7:00-8:30 p.m. at the Widener Law School, Room A180, 3737 Vartan Way, Hbg.,17110

**Monday, March 30**

\* The **Senate Appropriations Committee** will meet with the Department of Education to discuss the governor's proposed budget.

**Tuesday, March 31**

\* The **House Urban Affairs Committee** will meet to consider [House Bill 11](#) (Rep. Grove, R-York), which establishes the Lean Management Practices Program that would provide training to the administrators of financially struggling municipalities and school districts in financial recovery status.

**Tuesday, April 14**

\* The **House Finance Committee** will meet to discuss priorities and issues of counties, municipalities and school districts. PSBA will be presenting testimony at the meeting.