

State Update

In Memoriam



**Senator Jim Rhoades:
A Champion of Children**

Sen. James Rhoades, R-Schuylkill, will be remembered fondly for his dedication to advancing education issues. The former teacher and coach died unexpectedly Oct. 18 from injuries sustained in a car accident.

At Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, we've always admired Sen. Rhoades for his fair and balanced approach to solving problems and advancing issues – some that were close to his heart and others that faced an uphill battle. His experience as a teacher

Published by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a strong, effective, and trusted voice to improve the health, education, and well-being of the Commonwealth's children. Joan L. Benso, President and CEO.

and coach at Pottsville and Mahanoy City High Schools, and as the principal of Mahanoy Area Junior High School, was reflected in every decision he made – with temperance and evenness.

As chairman of the Senate Education Committee, Sen. Rhoades was a part of many major initiatives. His legacy includes the Pennsylvania Safe Schools Act, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletics Accountability Act, and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.

Our staff extends condolences to the Senator's family, friends, colleagues and constituents. The Pennsylvania State Senate has a lost a true champion of children.

Elections Update

Watch our Children and Elections web page for a summary of the election results.

www.papartnerships.org/elections.asp

**State Budget Freezes
Affect Education Programs**

Gov. Ed Rendell is freezing \$289 million in state spending to keep the state's budget in balance in light of the revenue shortfall that

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some estimate could reach as much as \$500 million by the end of this month.

Among the areas hit by the freezes include \$2.6 million in commonwealth technology services, \$9.8 million for school assessments and \$2.2 million for general operating costs for the state police.

The cuts in the Department of Education include:

- *Assessment* (\$9,800,000, 18.01%)
- *Teacher Professional Development* (\$2,858,000, 6.72%)
- *CTE* (\$950,000, 1.49%)
- *Early Intervention* (\$3,200,000, 1.73%)
- *High School Reform* (\$123,000, 1.13%)
- *Technical Colleges* (\$500,000, 50%)
- *Higher Education Assistance* (\$874,000, 4.25%)

The cuts at the Department of Public Welfare include:

- *County Child Welfare* (\$1,000,000, 0.09%)
- *Child Care Services* (\$2,000,000, 1.16%)
- *Child Care Assistance* (\$8,000,000, 3.57%)

Public Hearings Focus on College Affordability

The State Board of Education's higher education council is hosting a series of public hearings throughout the state on college affordability. The panel heard testimony from parents, students, college administrators and others on how students might be able to obtain a degree without taking on massive debt. Officials say Pennsylvania college students graduate with an average of almost \$23,000 in student loan debt.

Joan Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, who testified at the hearing held at Harrisburg Area Community College, said that Pennsylvania's young people who drop out of high school earn about \$19,000 a year on average compared to \$27,000 for a high school graduate.

"I contend that it would be very difficult to support a family on either of these earnings," she said.

"However, if a student attends some college or earns an associate's degree, he or she can expect to earn nearly \$33,000; and for a bachelor's degree it's \$46,000 – almost 136 percent more than the high school dropout."

Benso said all students, including the economically and educationally disadvantaged, should have the opportunity to go to college without having to take on large student loan debt.

"Pennsylvania must support those college-qualified young people who face financial barriers to a college education. This includes those students graduating from high school and also young people 25 years of age or younger who are returning to college, have dropped out of high school and have gone back to earn their high school credential, and those going back to earn high school and postsecondary credits simultaneously," she said.

More information is available online by visiting www.pde.state.pa.us and clicking on the State Board of Education link.

PAready@21

PPC also just released a report this month – *Dropping Back In: Re-engaging Out-of-School Youth* – which shows that twice as many high school dropouts are unemployed as their diploma-holding peers. It recommends state and local policy strategies and initiatives to re-connect high school dropouts with their education. You can read more about the report at www.papartnerships.org/droppingbackin.

PA Agencies Face Budget Cuts

The Senate Appropriations Committee held a public hearing Oct. 6 on the current economic crisis and its impact on Pennsylvania. Secretary of the Budget



Mary Soderberg testified about the current economic situation in Pennsylvania, and emphasized that the state is monitoring expenses closely.

For example, Governor Rendell ordered all state agencies to make budget cuts totaling 4 percent, instituted a hiring freeze and prohibited out-of-state travel for state business. It is also important to note, that after Secretary Soderberg's presentation, Rendell also requested that the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education reduce its 2008-2009 budget by \$22 million, or 4 percent. The Board of Trustees complied with his request. It also agreed to a request by the governor to set aside approximately \$22 million from this year's state appropriation in case sagging state revenues require the Commonwealth to reduce its 2008-09 budget later this fiscal year. The amount would be equivalent to 4.25 percent of PASSHE's current year appropriation of \$498.5 million.

Pennsylvania is not alone.

According to a new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state revenues nationwide are taking a dive and shortfalls could occur in education, health care and other services. Some 39 states already have reported or projected budget problems for the current fiscal year (which began July 1 in most states) or the upcoming fiscal year; this number is likely to rise.

Many of the actions states may take to balance their budgets will be harmful to families and to the economy. State taxes pay for aid to K-12 schools, support for public colleges and universities, health coverage for children, families, seniors and people with disabilities, public safety, and transportation. Learn more about the report at www.cbpp.org/10-24-08sfp.htm.

[Pennsylvania Schools Honored for Excellence](#)

Nearly 1,900 Pennsylvania schools are being honored with Keystone Achievement Awards for showing sustained academic progress over the past two school years. The Pennsylvania Department of

Education says this year's recipients include hundreds of schools that have high percentages of low-income students or that are leading the way in academically challenged school districts, including:

- 596 schools with above-average numbers of low-income students. Research shows these students typically face greater academic challenges.
- 147 schools that have especially high concentrations of low-income students who have some of the greatest academic needs.
- 123 schools that are meeting AYP targets and leading the way, even though their home districts are in school improvement or corrective action, the two lowest ratings under No Child Left Behind.

For more information on the Keystone Achievement Awards, a complete list of award winners and more details about Pennsylvania's other education initiatives, visit www.pde.state.pa.us.

Pennsylvania Education Finance Symposium

Thursday, November 20, 2008

Harrisburg Holiday Inn & Conference Center
148 Sheraton Drive, New Cumberland, PA 17070

For more information or to register, log on to
www.eplc.org/financesymposium.html

[New Child Care Certification Regulation Training Video Available](#)

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) announced the online availability of a new Child Care Certification Regulation Training video. During the months of August and September, OCDEL Bureau of Certification Services staff conducted training sessions for providers regarding the new child care



regulations. The session conducted Aug. 18 was recorded to be shared with those unable to attend a training session.

Viewers can access the hyperlink to the video via the Department of Public Welfare website, at www.dpw.state.pa.us.



CHIP Enrollment Continues to Grow

CHIP enrollment jumped to 178,018 in October, a 1.1 percent increase over the month. The program

grew 8.3 percent over the year and showed growth in 63 counties. There were 9,583 children enrolled in CHIP in October who would not have been eligible before Cover All Kids.

State Revenue Update

Pennsylvania collected \$1.6 billion in General Fund revenue in October, \$283.4 million, or 14.7 percent, less than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$7.4 billion, which is \$564.8 million, or 7.1 percent, below estimate.

Federal Update

Regulations to No Child Left Behind Announced

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings recently announced final regulations to strengthen and clarify No Child Left Behind (NCLB), focusing on improved accountability and transparency, uniform and disaggregated graduation rates and improved parental notification for Supplemental Education Services and public school choice.

The Secretary noted that these new regulations reflect lessons learned over the past six years since NCLB was enacted and builds on work that states have made with their assessment and accountability systems. One area that includes broad public consensus is the need for a uniform graduation rate.

“As far back as 2005, governors from all 50 states agreed to adopt a uniform, more accurate graduation rate. But so far, only 16 states have done so,” Spellings said. “Parents know that a high school diploma is the least their children need to succeed in today’s economy.”

Under the new regulations, all states will use the same formula to calculate how many students graduate from high school on time and how many drop out. The final regulations define the “four year adjusted cohort graduation rate” as the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who entered high school four years earlier, adjusted for transfers, students who emigrate and deceased students. The data will be made public so that educators and parents can compare how students of every race, background and income level are performing.

The final rules announced by the Secretary also require that parents must be notified in a clear and timely way about their public school choice and supplemental education service options. The regulations seek to ensure that states make more information available to the public about what tutoring providers are available, how these providers are approved and monitored, and most importantly, how effective they are in helping students improve.



Second Economic Stimulus Aid Proposed

In testimony recently before the House Budget Committee, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke expressed support for a second economic stimulus package. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), and many others in the majority in Congress have been pushing for a broad stimulus focused on building infrastructure, creating jobs, and preventing the loss of health care and other vital services for vulnerable populations.

Twenty-nine states anticipated shortfalls totaling \$48 billion when enacting their 2009 budgets, and an estimated 22 states and the District of Columbia are currently facing mid-year budget shortfalls of at least \$11 billion. When times are tight, states unfortunately often are forced to cut programs serving some of their most vulnerable residents.

Over the next weeks, the House and Senate will continue a series of hearings on the need for a second stimulus package and what its components should be. Also unclear is whether Congressional leaders would bring up stimulus bills in a special session, when they would still be negotiating with the current president or whether they would wait until early next year when a new administration has taken over.

Children Less Likely to Graduate than their Parents

A study released by the Education Trust shows that students today are less likely to graduate from school than their parents. According to the study, dropout rates have not changed – one in four kids is still dropping out of school.

In fact, the United States is now the only industrialized country where young people are less likely than their parents to earn a diploma, the report said. While high schools are required to meet graduation targets every year as part of the 2002 federal No Child Left Behind law, those are determined by the states, not the federal government.

Nationally, one of every four high school students fails to graduate on time. For African-American and Latino students, that rate increases to more than one in three.

For more information on the report, visit www2.edtrust.org.

Food Stamp Program Expands

As of Oct. 1, the “Food Stamp Program” will now be called the “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program” (SNAP). One other recent federal change includes the elimination of the dependent care deduction. The program has allowed a deduction from income for child care expenses, but the deduction amount has been capped at \$175/month per child for most households. The new Farm Bill has eliminated that cap.

For more information, visit www.fns.usda.gov/fsp.

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