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Welcome to the Winter 2018 issue of *informED*, a publication from your school district and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association to keep you informed regarding the education issues affecting your students. *InformED*, takes parents from the Capitol, to the school district, to the classroom. Learn more and become an advocate for public education!

New law impacts public education

Parents should be aware of these changes in state law under Act 55 of 2017 that became effective on Nov. 6, 2017:

Delay in graduation requirements: The use of the state Keystone Exams in Algebra I, Biology and Literature as a graduation requirement is delayed until the 2019-20 school year.

School meals: Schools may not deny a meal to a student, regardless of whether he or she has money to pay for the meal or owes money. Students who cannot pay or owe money cannot be publicly identified or stigmatized, be required to perform chores or forced to discard a meal after it was served.

Emergency drills: Schools may conduct a security drill to practice procedures to respond to an emergency situation, such as an act of terrorism, armed intruder situation or other violent threat. Schools must notify and request assistance from local law enforcement and emergency management agencies, and must notify parents in advance of the drill.

Opioid abuse prevention: Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, schools must provide instruction to students in grades 6-12 related to the prevention of opioid abuse.

Agricultural education: The subject of forestry is added to the list of agricultural education topics for which the state must provide re-

sources and programming to students in grades K-12. A new Commission for Agricultural Education Excellence will assist the Departments of Education and Agricultural in continuing efforts regarding agricultural education.

Dates to Remember

School district budgeting process begins

Your school board has begun preparing the district's budget for the coming fiscal year that begins July 1. Boards are required by law to adopt their final budgets by June 30, and between now and then your board has various deadlines it must follow to allow for proper planning and public comment. However, the board's June 30 deadline is the same as the General Assembly's deadline to adopt a state budget. This means that school boards usually must create a budget without knowing how much money the district will receive in state subsidies. In years when the state budget is late, this is especially hard.

The amount of available funds can determine what programs and services school districts can offer or continue. Your school board must also budget money to pay for many programs and services that are mandated by federal and state law. Many of these mandates are underfunded or districts receive no money at all to pay for them. This strain on budget flexibility, combined with unpredictable contributions from the state, often puts school boards in a difficult position.

Despite the challenging process, you can help your school board and your students. It's important to understand *why* your school-funding pie gets divided as it does, the amount of state versus local funding provided, and what those funds pay for. Open the lines of communication, and tell your board about which programs and services are important to your students, and why. If cuts must be made, consider what parents and the community can do to partner with your district to offer or preserve programs, as well as extracurricular functions. And consider becoming an advocate in the state budget process by talking with your legislators about the need for adequate state funding for public schools.

Parent advocacy in the state budget process

Gov. Wolf will present his state budget proposal for the 2018-19 fiscal year to the General Assembly in early February. During the spring, legislators will draft amendments to the plan and negotiations will continue until an agreement is reached on a new state budget. Funding for public schools will be part of the discussions, and legislators need to hear about the needs of your schools and students.

How can parents advocate and influence the state budget? Here are some suggestions:

- Get the facts – Know what is being proposed at the state level for education and what it means at the local level for your school district and students.
- Identify your legislators – Know who to talk to, and how to reach them. Phone calls and emails are the best ways to reach them.
- Tell your story – Talk about how important adequate state funding is to your schools and use examples of specific programs and students helped. Talk about what would happen if funding were increased, or if it were cut.
- Communicate effectively – Present your ideas clearly and concisely. It is important to build relationships with your legislators. Understand their position on key issues so that you can show how your position will benefit his or her constituents.
- Be persistent – Start the process early, keep at it and be patient.

PSSA test changes for spring 2018

The PA Department of Education (PDE) announced that students in grades 3 through 8 will spend an average of 20% less time on statewide PSSA testing this year, and an even greater reduction – nearly 25% – for the youngest students. The tests have been shortened without changing the rigor of these assessments, which could eliminate up to two full testing days for some schools. For test administration in 2019, PDE anticipates shortening that window and moving it toward the end of the year to provide teachers more time for instruction and to minimize disruptions to classes.

National look at parent and family involvement

According to data recently released by the National Center for Education Statistics:

- 89% of students had parents who reported attending a school or a parent-teacher organization or association meeting.
- 78% of students had parents who attended a school or class event; 43% had parents who volunteered or served on a school committee; 59% had parents who participated in school fundraising; and 33% had parents who met with a guidance counselor.
- 83% of students in grades K-2 had parents who felt that the amount of homework their child is assigned is “about right.” This percentage was significantly higher than the percentage for students in grades 3-5 (75%), students in grades 6-8 (73%), and students in grades 9-12 (70%).

• According to their parents, 94% of students in grades K-12 did homework outside of school. Among those students, 86% had a place set aside for homework in their home and 66% had an adult in the household who checked that their homework was done.

NCES: [Parent and Family Involvement in Education: Results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016.](#)