



2015-16 PSBA Legislative Victory Report



Taking Action

for Public Schools

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is the voice of school boards and public education across the state. During the 2015-16 session of the General Assembly, PSBA tracked thousands of bills, and participated in meetings, provided testimonies, analyses and comments on key proposals. The association worked to win support for the issues of greatest importance to local school officials, and to defeat those that were bad public policy. PSBA also kept members updated on issues and events, and encouraged them to become engaged in the process. To our members, thank you for your efforts and the impact you made. Here are highlights of the efforts and accomplishments we achieved.

Providing advocacy and assistance during the 2015-16 budget impasse

During the nearly nine-month-long 2015-16 budget impasse, PSBA was actively involved in efforts with legislators and the Governor's Office to help end the stalemate, assist school districts and provide information. To gauge the impact of the impasse on members, PSBA conducted two surveys and reports – one in October 2015 and another February 2016 – that identified the financial impacts for school districts and the consequences they faced.

PSBA also entered into court action on behalf of its members. In October 2015 the association challenged the unlawful diversion of Property Tax Reduction Allocation funds from the Gaming Fund/Property Tax Relief Fund that were due to be paid to school districts for the benefit of taxpayers. In January 2016, PSBA filed suit seeking an order to compel the continued release of federal and state funds to districts. In March 2016, PSBA asked the court to order the state to pay school districts immediately all subsidies that were due to be paid in February.

Working for the adoption of a fair funding formula for school districts: Acts 25 and 35 of 2016

The need for the state to provide adequate, equitable and fair funding for basic and special education is a priority for school districts. PSBA advocated for the enactment of a new basic education funding formula that directs money to school districts based on objective factors, such as student enrollment, the needs of the student population, and school district wealth and capacity to raise local revenues. PSBA worked hard to get this language into the Fiscal Code bill under Act 25 of 2016 that applied the formula to the distribution of 2015-16 funds. Those efforts continued through the enactment of Act 35 of 2016 that made the formula permanently applicable for the payment of basic subsidy funds.

Pushing to get school districts state funds owed for construction projects: Act 25 of 2016

PSBA worked persistently to push the General Assembly to pay the school districts that are owed millions of dollars in promised state reimbursement for construction and renovation projects, and to modernize the state's complicated process for project approval. Act 25 of 2016 authorized the state to borrow up to \$2.5 billion through the Commonwealth Financing Authority to address the backlog and provide the reimbursements. The

distribution of overdue funds began in late October with more payments to come. Act 25 also established an advisory committee to recommend changes in 2017 to the PlanCon approval process, and PSBA has a seat on that panel. PSBA also convened its own workgroup of stakeholders to examine these issues and offer recommendations for improvement. A report was issued in November 2016.

Pausing high-stakes graduation requirements and helping to find a better solution: Act 1 of 2016

PSBA opposes high-stakes testing and advocated for legislation under Act 1 of 2016 that created a delay in the implementation of the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement or a benchmark for the need to participate in a project-based assessment until 2019. The association continues to be actively involved in discussions for new options for graduation requirements that provide flexibility for students and school districts.

Providing significant improvements to Pennsylvania's truancy system: Act 138 of 2016

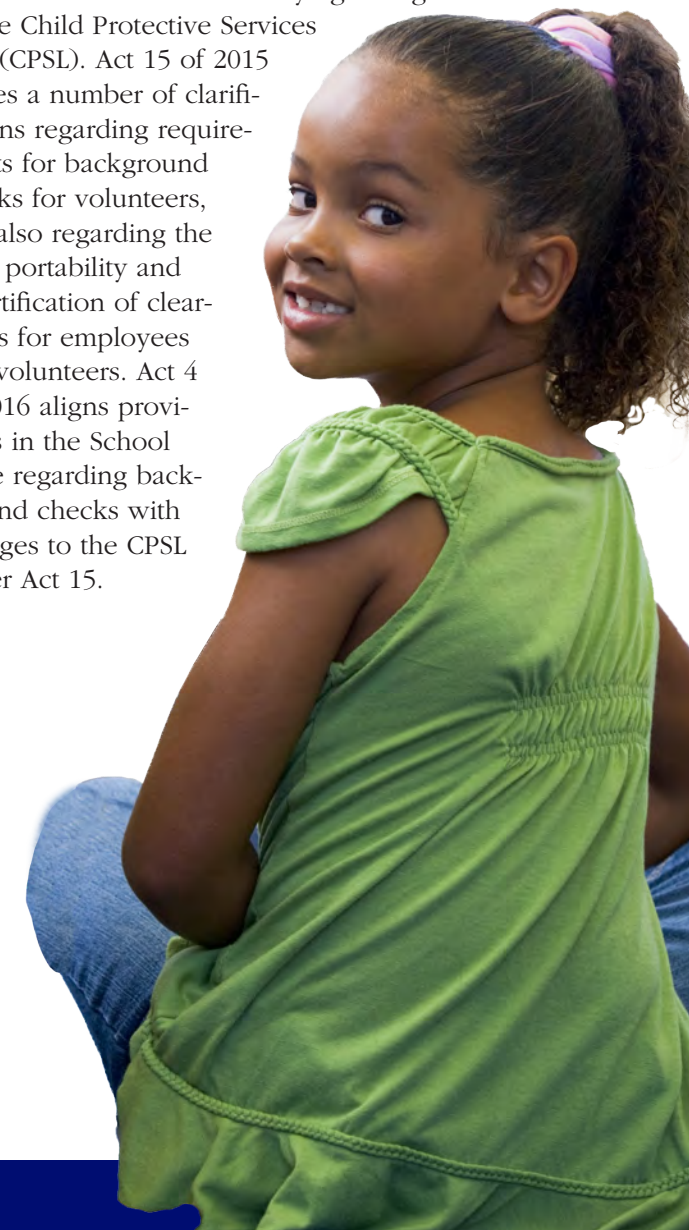
Act 138 of 2016 represented a major accomplishment for PSBA, who took the lead to bring the recommendations of the statewide Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup to the Hill. The group, convened by the Pennsylvania Supreme

Court, consists of PSBA, judges, magisterial district justices, probation officers, educational organizations, and children and youth services professionals. The workgroup drafted legislative language that could be used to more effectively combat truancy by reducing excessive absenteeism. PSBA refined the draft and worked to push it through the General Assembly.

Recommending important clarifications to the Child Protective Services Law: Act 15 of 2015, Act 4 of 2016

PSBA worked extensively with the General Assembly to make two sets of clarifying changes related to the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). Act 15 of 2015 makes a number of clarifications regarding requirements for background checks for volunteers, and also regarding the cost, portability and recertification of clearances for employees and volunteers. Act 4 of 2016 aligns provisions in the School Code regarding background checks with changes to the CPSL under Act 15.

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Giving school districts emergency day flexibility: Act 4 of 2016

PSBA actively sought enactment of legislation to allow the secretary of education to issue weather, safety or health related emergency declarations under which school districts can be given additional flexibility to satisfy the requirement to provide 180 instructional days per school year. The law gives districts the ongoing ability to make the necessary schedule adjustments to meet instructional requirements in the event of unforeseen closures.

Protecting students from unsafe hazing rituals: Act 31 of 2016

Legislation sought by PSBA expands Pennsylvania's anti-hazing law to also apply to public secondary schools (grades 7-12). PSBA worked extensively to secure passage of the bill that became Act 31 of 2016, highlighting the importance of student safety and the need to create a positive school climate by effectively dealing with bullying, harassment and hazing in public schools.

Fighting new mandates and harmful proposals

PSBA continuously weighed the effects of proposed legislation on school districts, and repeatedly pointed out where new mandates or bad public policy would be created. The association aggressively – and successfully – fought to defeat numerous bills with a negative impact on school districts. Among the most onerous bills PSBA stopped were those that planned to do the following:

- Remove the Act 1 index and all the allowed exceptions, and mandate referendum for all tax issues in a manner that eliminates school boards' ability to build a budget, pay for mandated costs and make decisions based on local needs.
- Eliminate the right of school boards to conduct appeals of under-assessed property, leaving boards with no way to adjust assessments to attempt to fairly balance the property tax system.

- Expand earned income tax crediting in a manner that would cause many school districts to lose significant amounts of revenue annually.
- Establish a process for a state takeover of academically struggling schools based on standardized test scores and turn them into privately operated charter schools.
- Create an unacceptable proposal for charter school expansion policy that does nothing to create meaningful accountability reforms or relief from increasing charter school costs.

Giving legislators, members and the public a deeper dive on key issues

During the 2015-16 legislative session, PSBA authored numerous special reports that provided an in-depth examination of key issues. They include these:

- The Need for a New BEF Formula
- Starting the Conversation: Strategies for Achievement and Accountability
- The Critical Need for Charter School Reform
- Charter School Revenues, Expenditures and Transparency
- School District Mandates: Their Impact on Public Education
- The Financial Impact of the Budget Impasse on Pennsylvania School Districts
- Meaningful Change Under the Every Student Succeeds Act: Recommendations from Pennsylvania Public Education Stakeholders
- Building a Better Process for School Construction Reimbursement: Recommendations of the PSBA Work Group for PlanCon Improvements
- PSBA's Closer Look series
- Referendum: It's not tax reform
- School truancy, dropout concerns call for legislative & policy changes
- Why assessment appeals help school districts tax more fairly
- 2016-16 Education Investment

Looking ahead

These accomplishments highlight the role of PSBA as the voice of school boards across Pennsylvania. The 2017-18 session offers new opportunities for PSBA to take action on numerous issues, working to emphasize the value of public education; lessen the impact of mandates; address the pension crisis; seek continued investments in public schools, and enact meaningful charter school reform.