



The *1ST* School Boards Association in the Nation—Celebrating our Longstanding History and Vision for the Future!
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April 21, 2020

Dear PSBA members,

The past five weeks has been like no other time in our history. On behalf of PSBA's governing board and staff, thank you for the dedicated work you, your local board, administrators, teachers and staff have undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been amazing to see school districts across the commonwealth instantly respond and convert their operations to remote learning, roll out food service programs for our most vulnerable students and address numerous other challenges. PSBA is in awe of your service and continues to stand with you.

Over the past month, we have launched a comprehensive online website for COVID-19 resources, a social media campaign aimed at drawing attention to your local work, a text alert service to reach you with late-breaking information, numerous webinars, weekly virtual forums for local board leaders to share their ideas and challenges, and an inspirational series of talks – our "Keynote Series." We have also provided numerous guidance documents, legal analyses, legislative advocacy at the state and federal level, significant policy guidance, free subscriptions to BoardDocs and a comprehensive Zoom license to each and every school board, IU and CTC that requires the tools to help them remain in touch with their boards and the public.

Like you, PSBA has also made it a priority to ensure that our team is safe. We have been working remotely since March 17 and will do so as long as health officials continue to urge social distancing.

Our board has been meeting regularly, receiving updates on the health of PSBA and discussing the ways we can continue to serve our members. Last week, the Governing Board of PSBA met to discuss the status of the annual PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference held annually in October.

While discussions around an October conference may seem premature, the process of planning and executing a conference of this size requires many months and many people to participate. In fact, registration and hotel room booking information was slated to launch in mid-March, just after the COVID pandemic caused schools to close across Pennsylvania. At that time, PSBA delayed the launch of the registration and marketing efforts in hopes that the conference information could be sent out by mid-April.

Sadly, that has not been the case – as we now know that schools will remain closed for the remainder of the academic year. The governing board, in consultation with our partners at PASA, has determined that PSBA should cancel the planned 2020 conference for several reasons.

First, we recognize that there continues to be great uncertainty around the impact COVID-19 will have this fall and beyond. There are conflicting expert opinions around whether public gatherings will be advisable through

summer months and into the fall. We cannot know if state and federal health officials will condone a large conference such as the Hershey gathering. This forces us to err on the side of caution and seek to protect the lives of our members, partners and staff by proactively opting not to conduct a large conference.

In addition, districts are facing a challenging period ahead as they conclude the 2019-20 academic year remotely and do the work required to plan for the 2020-21 school year, even as they are still performing their roles remotely. Now is not the time for school leaders to be dealing with conference registrations and room arrangements. There is simply too little time for planning and too little time for PSBA members to respond if conference registration is delayed until everyone returns this fall.

Finally, we know that in the coming year, all school districts across Pennsylvania will face greater budget pressures than they may have faced in the last decade. While PSBA has continued to keep conference costs as low as possible, we recognize that it is inappropriate for any district personnel to look at spending funds for a professional development conference in the coming year. Now is not the time for organizations to conduct expensive trainings when district budgets are stretched thin. PSBA will lead in this effort by ensuring that any conference or multiday training event we offer through the 2020-21 school year is done at no cost for our membership.

We will have another announcement soon regarding a joint PSBA-PASA virtual conference this fall that will permit our members to connect with one another and hear from outstanding presenters in a remote environment. We are also going to be using this technology to transition our summer Solicitors Symposium and School Board Secretaries Conference to a virtual gathering. Protecting the health and safety of our members will continue to be our first concern, and we believe these format changes are necessary to meet that commitment.

Our fall conference was to feature a celebration of our 125th year – a milestone occasion as the nation's oldest school boards association! While the celebration will not occur in person, PSBA will be utilizing this landmark to expand our offerings to our members and seek new ways of meeting their needs in this evolving environment. PSBA will look to provide an alternative format for a fall educational event that continues to assist school directors and district leaders in growing professionally and meeting the needs of students from across the commonwealth.

This has been and will continue to be an incredibly challenging time for everyone involved in public education. I hope that you are safe, healthy and able to be with your loved ones during this time of uncertainty. On behalf of PSBA, thank you for all you have done and continue to do for our Pennsylvania school students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Mains', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nathan G. Mains
Chief Executive Officer