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For Immediate Release

January 31, 2022

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SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS FEDERAL ESSER FUNDING, OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES AND THE CONTINUATION OF MANDATED COST GROWTH

HARRISBURG (1/31/22)— The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO), and the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) released their Winter 2022 School District Budget Report today, Monday, January 31st 2022.

This budget report recounts stories and insights gathered from superintendents, school business officials, and others involved in school business operations throughout the Commonwealth. The report illustrates how school districts across the Commonwealth find themselves navigating a new normal – working through the lasting effects of the pandemic while addressing student needs, battling increases in mandated costs, massive statewide educational labor shortages, significant supply chain issues, and stringent requirements associated with ESSER funding.

Labor issues across the spectrum for operational and instructional student services and support functions were reported as the top concern and challenge for all three survey respondent groups (superintendents, school business officials, and operational specialists). Survey responses showed there are also significant levels of concern for supply chain and fiscal issues among most schools, including (1) procurement disruptions for technology, food, and equipment along with (2) budgeting constraints resulting from an accelerated growth in state and federal mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pension contributions.

Additionally, this budget report reveals how schools are heavily investing federal ESSER funds into three major areas: (1) student-centered academic and support programs supplemented by (2) improvements to healthy learning environments and (3) expanded technology access.

The annual budget report strongly recommends state and federal policymakers strengthen and expand funding support and mandate relief in a predictable and sustainable way to schools experiencing accelerated growth in mandated costs for special education, charter school tuition, and pensions; ensure that school funding is predictable, consistent, and sustainable as districts unwind ESSER funding and begin to plan budgetary needs over the next three years; ensure that the schools that are investing in successful federal ESSER programs can sustain these programs well beyond the current statutory deadline; and assist schools in overcoming the severe supply chain, labor, and fiscal challenges so they can more effectively provide pupil transportation, food service, technology requirements, infrastructure updates, and student support.

The budget report can be viewed here: https://www.pasbo.org//Files/Winter%202022%20Report_Final.pdf