

**Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators  
May 2009 Newsletter**

**PACTA Strategic Plan**

On June 30, 2009 the current three year PACTA Strategic Plan will come to a conclusion. Activities are now being planned to renew the three year strategic plan covering July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2012. Many changes have taken place in Career and Technical Education since the current strategic plan went into effect on July 1, 2006. In May, the PACTA Executive Committee will convene to begin discussions on the strategic plan with the intention of having a proposal to be discussed at the 2009 PACTA Summer Conference in State College.

**Technical Assistance Program**

PACTA and PDE are teaming together to offer a program of technical assistance to career and technical centers for the second consecutive year. On April 22, 2009 a total of 36 schools, Cohort I and II, gathered for a kick off meeting of the Technical Assistance Program (TAP) for the 2009 -2010 school year. The meeting was held at the Penn Stater Conference Center. The purpose of TAP is to significantly raise the academic and technical achievement of all students at Career and Technical Centers (CTCs). Through TAP, PDE will assist CTCs and sending school districts with raising student performance on the PSSA and technical end of program assessments. All participating CTCs will develop an improvement plan for increasing student achievement, work with a Career and Technical Distinguished School Leader (CTDSL) and participate in all professional development activities provided by BCTE and PACTA. For more information on the Technical Assistance Program (TAP) please contact, Dr. Lee Burket, State Director, BCTE at: [lburket@state.pa.us](mailto:lburket@state.pa.us) or Ms. Jackie Cullen, Executive Director, PACTA at: [jackie@pacareertech.org](mailto:jackie@pacareertech.org).

**Current PACTA PIL Programs – NOCTI/OCA & PSSA**

The 2008-2009 PACTA PIL programs in the areas of PSSA and NOCTI achievement are currently being implemented with all program participants. Each PIL program required participants to complete the following activities:

- Attend a one day session for each PIL program in October of 2008
- Conduct job embedded assignments as a part of the PIL program
- Participate in a mid-year (approximately) conference on the status of the job embedded assignments
- Attend a final one day (or less session) in August or September 2009 that concludes the PIL program
- Complete and submit a Final Report on the job embedded assignments which is the final step towards receiving the PIL credits from PACTA

During April, the CTDSLs visited TAP school administrators who are involved in the PIL program and Dr. Robert Clark will be visiting other PIL schools which are not in the TAP program. The purpose of these visits is to meet the mid-year conference requirement of each PIL program. PIL participants will be contacted about scheduling their conferences. More information on the final one day session will be forthcoming in upcoming newsletters.

### **New Special Education PACTA PIL**

Recently, PDE approved an application from PACTA to offer a Special Education PIL program focused on improving PSSA & OCA/NOCTI student achievement among IEP students in Career and Technical Education. The Special Education PIL program will be modeled after the previous PIL programs with some modifications based on feedback received from those programs. The initial session of the PIL will be offered twice, August 10 and 11 at the Nittany Lion Inn and September 15 and 16 at the Penn Stater Conference Center. Further information and registration materials will be e-mailed out in the near future.

### **Graduation Competency Exam: PDE/PSBA Agreement**

In March, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) announced they have reached an agreement on high school graduation requirements and the end of course exams (Graduation Competency Assessments - GCAs) proposed by the state last year. Under the agreement, GCAs will be replaced with a series of state-developed standard final exams called "Keystone Exams" that will be offered to school districts (and comprehensive CTCs), along with a voluntary model curriculum and diagnostic tools to identify and help struggling students. School districts could still use locally developed and administered tests to make high school graduation determinations, provided that the tests have been independently validated to make certain they are academically rigorous. Further, school districts that use an independently validated local assessment would not have to use the state-provided standard final exams. The cost to validate local assessments would be shared equally between the state and the school district; however, funds would have to be allocated by the legislature for this purpose. Districts and comprehensive CTCs also could continue to use other options for assessing high school students for graduation, such as student performance on the PSSA state math and reading exams, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate exams. Keystone exams would remain high-stakes and disadvantage students in career and technical education

### **GCA/Keystone Exams – An Alternative to the PDE/PSBA Agreement**

PACTA has been extremely active along with other educational and testing organizations to provide a counter proposal to the PDE/PSBA agreement on high school graduation requirements and graduation competency exams otherwise known as GCAs. PDE/PSBA advocates replacing GCAs with Keystone Exams but with many of the same components originally objected to by the coalition of which PACTA is a member and active participant. In April the group (known as the Coalition for Effective and Responsible Testing or CERT) offered an alternative proposal which is based on sound principles of effective and reliable testing strategies. The alternative proposal includes PDE provided Keystone Exams for voluntary use as end-of-course final exams. They will not be high stakes and graduation will not be dependent on their results. The proposal also requires PDE to request the USDE's approval to use the Keystone Exams in place of the PSSA. If the request is granted, the PSSA would be eliminated for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The proposal also contains significant directives that PDE would initiate to insure that the Keystone Exams were valid along with providing districts with technical assistance to improve

their assessment systems. PACTA will continue to be active in the coalition and provide the membership with relevant and up-to-date information as it becomes available.

### **ACTE National Policy Seminar**

Pennsylvania was well represented at the National Policy Seminar held in Alexandria, Virginia in March. John Pulver of PACTA led a group of Pennsylvania educators on several visits to Capitol Hill. Many representatives were visited and personal meetings were held with staffers and Senator Arlen Specter. The focus of the visits was to solidify support for Perkins and to continue the dialogue with legislators about the level of importance of CTE in helping the national economy recover and providing an alternative means for students to demonstrate their abilities.

### **Federal Economic Stimulus – Career and Technical Education**

PDE has released a [guide for school districts](#) on investing the estimated \$2.7 billion Pennsylvania will receive in federal economic stimulus dollars for education.

The guide provides advice to districts in evaluating their needs and setting priorities for spending stimulus dollars. PDE encourages districts to focus federal funds on programs that increase student achievement and that are aligned with current academic strategies that are effectively aiding the lowest-performing students, while being mindful of the time frames for using funds envisioned in federal law and the duration of available federal funding. These funds can be used to support the modernization, renovation and repair of facilities; basic education; special education; **career and technical education**; and adult and family literacy. To access stimulus funds, CTCs will have to work through their Joint Operating Committees, Superintendents, and other member district officials to determine how these funds can be directed towards the CTC. Without the cooperation and collaboration of the member districts, stimulus funds will be unavailable to CTCs. The Department also is taking steps to assist districts interested in using stimulus funds for modernizing and upgrading school facilities by streamlining the PLANCON process for districts that seek state reimbursement for eligible construction projects.

### **More on the Pennsylvania and the Federal Stimulus**

The federal stimulus, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), provides Pennsylvania with \$2.6 billion in funds for education over the next two years. Of this amount, \$1.6 billion comes from the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which must be used to support basic education or restore cuts in higher education (\$44 million). The K-12 portion of the Stabilization Fund can be distributed only by the state's basic education formula or, if not, then by default, by the federal Title I formula. These stimulus dollars give the General Assembly the ability to fund the basic education formula over the next two years while the state economy and state revenues recover, thus enabling Pennsylvania to meet its statutory target for basic education funding in the 2009-10 fiscal year and keeping us on schedule to fully fund the formula by 2013-14.

### **Legislative Items of Interest**

[Senate Bill 55](#): Expands the list of criminal offenses that would prohibit a person from being employed in public or private schools. The recently passed bill was amended to

create a tiered system for certain offenses ranging from a three to ten year waiting period before a person could be employed by a school. SB 55 would authorize school districts, at their own cost, to request a state and federal background check when they have a reasonable belief that an employee has been arrested or convicted of a crime. This proposal also would require school employees to report convictions to their school's administrator. Under the bill, an employee's failure to report a conviction would result in termination from employment and a fine of up to \$2,500. SB 55 awaits further consideration by the full Senate.

**[Senate Bill 332](#)**: Raises the level at which school districts must solicit competitive bids or price quotes for construction contracts and the purchase of materials, supplies and equipment. The threshold for soliciting competitive bids would be raised from \$10,000 to \$25,000. The threshold for obtaining written or telephonic price quotes would be raised from \$4,000 to \$7,000. Under SB 332, these thresholds would be adjusted annually by the Consumer Price Index for all Urban Consumers. SB 332 has been re-referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee. If this bill becomes law, school districts and CTCs would no longer be required to solicit bids for items that cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Additionally, any item costing from \$7000 to \$25,000 would require written or telephone price quotes before purchasing. Districts and CTCs are required to keep records of the bidding process and the price quoting process to provide evidence of compliance when audited by the local auditor or the Pennsylvania Auditor General.

### **Senate Hearing on Teacher Strikes**

In late April, the **Senate Education Committee** held a public hearing on **teacher strikes** and their impact on public education. Testifiers at the hearing included the Allegheny Institute for Public Policy which presented their research on the number of work stoppages and comparisons of other states' policies on public employee strikes. Also providing testimony to the committee was StopTeacherStrikes.org which questioned the constitutionality of teacher strikes and made several recommendations including: eliminating the right of teachers to strike, teacher tenure and the ability of teacher unions to use public school district's payroll deduction service to collect union dues and PAC contributions. The Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers (AFT-Pennsylvania) testimony examined the purpose and impact of Act 88 of 1992. Their remarks focused on the reduction in the number of teacher strikes and important features of the act such as preserving students' instructional time by requiring 180 days of instruction by June 30th. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association identified several issues with the current law including the manner in which union leaderships receive strike authorization, Court of Common Pleas injunctive proceedings and work stoppage.

### **ACTE Initiatives of Interest**

ACTE has developed a [CTE Research Fact Sheet](#) contains the latest statistical information related to the importance of CTE in a variety of areas, including student academic achievement, earnings, dropout rates and occupational outlooks. To understand how CTE is implemented in your state, view ACTE's [CTE State Profiles](#) project.

[Education Trust](#) recently released its 2009 series of **Education Watch** reports that examine how well each state is doing on state and national assessments in reading and mathematics, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, access to rigorous curriculum, qualified teachers and college affordability. [Click here](#) for the Pennsylvania state report.

Recently, the [National Science Foundation](#) joined with **NASCAR** to produce a 12 module science video series that teaches the science and engineering principles underlying NASCAR racing. The series, [The Science of Speed](#), engages students in critical thinking and problem solving activities using exciting and real-world situations. According to a 2008 ESPN survey, 43% of adult NASCAR fans have children under the age of 18.

### Upcoming Events

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| May 13     | PACTA Executive Committee<br>Strategic Planning Meeting<br>Nittany Lion Inn<br>State College |
| May 14-15  | PACTA Adult Education Workshop<br>Nittany Lion Inn<br>State College                          |
| July 29-31 | PACTA Summer Conference<br>Nittany Lion Inn<br>State College                                 |