

Legislative Report – Mr. Mahler

State News

Inauguration – Tom Wolf of York County was sworn in last Tuesday as the 47th governor of Pennsylvania. In his inaugural address, Wolf stressed his policy priorities. “I want you to know that for the next four years, my administration will be dedicated to three simple goals: Jobs that pay. Schools that teach. And government that works — one that is worthy of our trust.”

Concerning education, Wolf said, “Getting Pennsylvania back on track also means we need schools that teach and provide all of our young people with the skills they need to find good jobs and compete in the global economy. In this limited government, free market system, our collective future depends on the next generation. Our state will never be as strong as it needs to be if some schools have all the resources they need and other schools are cutting band and football just to keep the lights on. That is why nothing is more essential than working together to make sure that every child in Pennsylvania has access to a great education, and that all teachers have the resources they need to deliver a great education. From early childhood to college and apprenticeships and training, we must strive to provide our kids an education that is both affordable and second to none. Our schools must be our highest priority.”

New Education Secretary – Pending Senate approval, Pedro Rivera will become Pennsylvania’s Secretary of Education. Rivera has been superintendent in Lancaster since 2008, is a member of the PASA Board of Governors and PASA Legislative Committee, and serves as a Pennsylvania representative to the AASA Governing Board. Prior to his position in Lancaster, Rivera served in several positions in the Philadelphia SD. Rivera was nominated to be the commonwealth’s next secretary of education earlier this week and pending Senate approval, he will immediately face a pile of pressing problems plaguing Pennsylvania schools. Wolf placed supreme importance in bolstering education spending throughout his campaign and reaffirmed that position again as he took office this week in Harrisburg. “Nothing is more essential than working together to make sure that every child in Pennsylvania has access to a great education, and that all teachers have the resources they need to deliver a great education,” Wolf said in his inauguration address Tuesday. “Our schools must be our highest priority.”

Philadelphia Teacher Contract Ruling – The Commonwealth Court ruled that the School Reform Commission does not have the authority to cancel the expired contract of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and impose terms, dealing a costly blow to the cash-strapped Philadelphia School District. The SRC swiftly voted Oct. 6 to unilaterally cancel the contract and impose changes to health-care benefits on teachers after 21 months of negotiations. The changes would have required PFT members to contribute between 5 and 13 percent toward their benefits while eliminating the district's contribution to the PFT Health and Welfare Fund, saving the district about \$44 million annually for the next four years. In its ruling, the court rejected the SRC's argument that provisions in the School Code gave it the power to impose terms. According to the court, the sides would have to declare an impasse, which has not happened.

Education Spending Gap in PA – The gap between what wealthy districts and poor districts spend to educate children has widened dramatically in the last four years. Tom Corbett took

office, amid deep budget-balancing cuts in state aid and long-delayed pension obligation payments coming due. Gaps that existed when Corbett took office have now more than doubled, according to an Associated Press analysis of state data on spending, income and attendance. The growing disparity that Corbett's successor, Democrat Tom Wolf, will inherit has helped Pennsylvania earn the label in one study as being among the worst states in educational disparity.

Gov. Tom Corbett's administration responded to the report. Acting Secretary of Education Carolyn Dumesq issued an op-ed criticizing an Associated Press report that concluded the gap between how much wealthy and poor schools spend per student more than doubled during the Republican's four-year tenure. "It's quite a stretch, if not a misrepresentation, to hold the governor accountable for spending decisions made by each school district," she said. The AP's Pennsylvania editor, Larry Rosenthal, said the news organization stands by its story.

State Budget Shortfall – The Wolf Transition Team last week issued an analysis of the state budget, concluding that the deficit for 2014-15 and 2015-16 will be higher than estimated by the Corbett administration. "After analyzing the budget documents and meeting with both the Independent Fiscal Office and the Office of the Budget, the Task Force projects that the budget shortfall will be \$2.33 billion in 2015-16 and could grow to as much as \$2.8 billion in 2016-17," the analysis states. "The Commonwealth faces a major budget challenge in 2015 and going forward. The state budget is deeply out of balance. Recurring revenues are growing at a slower rate than expenditures, and this trend has been further exacerbated by the use of one-time revenues and accounting measures." *Read the rest of the report: "Budget Task Force Finds \$2.33 Billion Deficit"* (1/16/15).

Financial Data and the SPP – For the past two school years, taxpayers who wanted to know about the academic performance of their schools and districts could find that information on the School Performance Profiles created by the state Department of Education. Now they can access detailed financial information about their districts on the profiles as well, including administrative and teacher salaries, budget totals, revenue streams and per-pupil costs. Those details were added Wednesday by the education department. The information posted now is from the 2012-13 school year. It will be updated as new information is reported to the state. *Read the rest of the story: "New State Website Provides Financial Data on School Districts, Teacher Salaries"* (from *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1/15/15). **Click here** to read a related story from *The Patriot-News* (1/14/15).

Testing Contract Extension – According to a story on Capitolwire (1/9/15), the state has extended its existing contract for development of the Keystone Exams, PSSA tests, End-of-Course exams and the Classroom Diagnostic Tool, among others, for 18 months through the end of the year, at a cost of \$50 million. In December, the PDE had announced it was awarding a \$210 million, five-year contract to a new assessment firm, Measured Progress, to take over development of Pennsylvania assessments. However, according to PDE spokesperson Tim Eller, that contract was cancelled due to time concerns and the assessment delivery deadlines of March 30 (PSSAs) and April 28 (Keystones). "This year is an extremely critical period for Pennsylvania's assessments," the letter to Measured Progress stated, noting that the 2015 Keystone Exams would be "high-stakes" for graduation and test results "will be a factor in the evaluation of educators and could impact their advancement, pay and continued employment."

Eller also told Capitolwire that the contract extension will “allow the current vendor’s contract to end at the end of a testing cycle rather than in the middle of a testing cycle.”

In related news: Rep. Mike Tobash has stated that he is looking for co-sponsors for a bill (HB168) that would stop the state from developing any more Keystone Exams beyond the English, Algebra 1 and Bio exams already in place. It would also allow local districts to make the decision as to whether to use the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement.

PSERS Status – Even after a fantastic year on the stock market, the pension fund for Pennsylvania’s public school employees is deep in the red. The Public School Employees Retirement System reported in December that it earned 14.91 percent for the past fiscal year, nearly doubling the fund’s 7.5 percent annual benchmark for investment earnings. As a result of the robust year in the market, PSERS’ unfunded liability has declined slightly, but the fund is still owes \$35 billion in benefits beyond what its assets can cover. When combined with the unfunded liability from the State Employees Retirement System, Pennsylvania is still facing \$50 billion in pension debt. *Read the rest of the story: “After Banner Year, PA School Pension Fund Still Deep in Red”* (from *The PA Independent*, 1/5/15).

Study of Cyber Charter Funding – Fewer teachers. No school building. No heating bill. Same cost. You’d think Pennsylvania’s 16 cyber-charter schools, which teach home-based students via the Web, would spend a lot less per student than bricks and mortar schools. Not so. So how exactly are the state’s cyber charters using this money? That’s the question Temple law professor Susan DeJarnatt set to answer in an article recently published in *Urban Lawyer*. Parsing the tax documents for the 12 cyber charters for which information was available, she found that cyber charters carry large surpluses and spend what she considered a disproportionate amount of Pennsylvania tax dollars on advertising, travel expenses and contracts with outside management and service providers. *Read the rest of the story: “Temple Prof: Pa. Cyber Charters Turning Huge Profits, Sending Tax Dollars out of State”* (from *newsworks.org*, 1/6/14).

Analysis of Cyber Charter Performance – A new study released by Research for Action has found that Pennsylvania’s cyber-charter sector continues to yield subpar results on the state’s standardized tests. Using the state’s SPP data for 2013-14, RFA found the average SPP score for the cyber-charter sector was 48.9 – well below the averages for the state’s brick and mortar charters and traditional public schools. *Read the rest of the story: “Pa. Cyber Charters Again Get Low Marks on State Tests”* (from *newsworks.org*, 11/17/14).

Charter School Report – A recent report issued by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NASCA) calls for more consistency in state standards for authorizing charter schools. “As states have followed their own paths, approaches have evolved in how charter schools are overseen and operate – each with strengths and weaknesses,” the executive summary notes. “Different problems have emerged in different states, and these differences depend on state policies, who does the authorizing, their practices, and the particular schools and operators in the state.” The NASCA recommends state policies have a legal framework to approve only good new charter schools, monitor the performance of all charter schools, empower successful schools to remain open and possibly grow, and close charter schools that persistently fail. In analyzing Pennsylvania, the NASCA pointed to the need for changes in the 1987 law.

“Pennsylvania should establish a high-quality statewide alternative authorizer, a default closure provision, and policy requiring authorizers to use strong performance management tools reflecting professional standards, authorizer standards, and essential authorizer accountability,” the NASCA recommends. “In addition, these strong accountability requirements must apply to all authorizers, including Philadelphia under the School Reform Commission, as well as both brick-and-mortar schools and virtual schools.” **Click here** to read the report.

Legislative News

Legislative Calendar – Both the House and Senate were scheduled to be in session Monday through Wednesday this week.

Legislative Education Committees – Members of the House and Senate Education Committees were announced last week. They are:

Senate

Lloyd Smucker (Lancaster), Majority Chair; Andrew Dinniman (Chester), Minority Chair

R: Mike Folmer (Lebanon), Pat Browne (Lehigh), John Eichelberger (Blair), Dominic Pileggi (Delaware), Robert Tomlinson (Bucks)

D: Daylin Leach (Montgomery), Rob Teplitz (Dauphin), Anthony Williams (Philadelphia)

House

Stan Saylor (York), Majority Chair; Jim Roebuck (Philadelphia), Minority Chair

R: Jim Christiana (Beaver), Rosemary Brown (Monroe), Hal English (Allegheny), Mark Gillen (Berks), Seth Grove (York), Kristin Hill (York), Harry Lewis (Chester), Bernie O’Neill (Bucks), Thomas Quigley (Montgomery), Kathy Rapp (Forest), Mike Reese (Westmoreland), Craig Staats (Bucks), Will Tallman (Cumberland), Mike Tobash (Schuylkill), Dan Truit (Chester)

D: Scott Conklin (Centre), Mike Carroll (Luzerne), Pat Harkins (Erie), Patty Kim (Dauphin), Mark Longietti (Mercer), Dan Miller (Allegheny), Gerald Mullery (Luzerne), Mike O’Brien (Philadelphia), Steve Santarsiero (Bucks), Kevin Schreiber (York)

Last Week’s Legislative Action – With a 7-4 party-line vote, with Republicans voting for and Democrats against, the Senate Finance Committee last week approved **SB 4**. The bill proposes to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to give the General Assembly the authority to define what constitutes an “institution of purely public charity” for the purpose of determining tax exempt status. The bill passed the General Assembly last session, but, since it is a Constitutional amendment, it must pass the General Assembly again this session and then be put on the ballot.

This Week’s Legislative Schedule –

Monday, Jan. 26: The Senate is scheduled to consider **SB 4** this week. (See above.)

Wednesday, Jan. 28: The House Education Committee will hold a voting meeting on the following bills:

- **HB 127** – amends the School Code to require a school entity to make available upon request to armed forces recruiters a list of 11th and 12th grade students and to notify all 10th and 11th graders and any 12th graders not yet
- **HB 139** – amends the Private Academic Schools Act to allow online schools to become licensed by the State Board of Private Academic Schools
- **HB 141** – amends the School Code to clarify that penalties for violation of the compulsory attendance requirements only apply if the violation was intentional and, for a violation, require that parents and guardians attend a parenting education program or perform community service or, as a last resort, be incarcerated for failure to pay court-imposed fines. The bill, introduced last year as HB 2356, was developed in response to a case in which a parent arrested for failure to pay fines died in jail. In **testimony** last year before the committee on HB 2356, PASA called for a comprehensive approach to the problem of truancy. “It is clear that truancy is a serious, widespread problem that can only be effectively addressed through collaboration among schools, the judiciary, law enforcement, county children and family services agencies, social and human service agencies and families,” PASA testifiers said. “The issue begs a comprehensive legislative and policy review that extends beyond the scope of authority of the education committee.” The House last session passed a resolution (**HR 1032**) directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct such a review and report its findings by October 2015.
- **HB 158** – amends the School Code to provide the Secretary of Education with the authority to issue weather, safety and health-related emergency declarations on a school district, county or statewide basis under which a school entity may satisfy the 180 instructional days requirement by one or more of the following: approving, by a majority of the school board, a school year meeting the minimum hour requirements in lieu of 180 days; or approving, by a majority vote of the school board, scheduling additional instructional days on not more than one Saturday per month to complete 180 instructional days or to meet the minimum hour requirement

Thursday, Jan. 29: The Basic Education Funding Commission will hold a hearing at 10 a.m. in the Greenville Junior/Senior High School in the Greenville Area SD. The commission continues to gather information and testimony on school funding issues as they work toward developing a new basic education funding formula by June 2015.

Background Check Laws – Act 153 of 2014 (formerly **HB 435**) concerns both school employees and school volunteers and is now in effect. The newly enacted law requires school employees and “volunteers having contact with children” to provide certification of their clearances every three years. The law’s requirements are as follows:

- requires a prospective school employee to obtain certification from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the state database as an alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation or as the perpetrator of a foundation or indicated report

- allows for provisional employment of up to 90 days pending clearance, provided the application has been made, the employer has no knowledge about the applicant that could disqualify him/her from employment, the applicant swears in writing that he/she has nothing in his/her background that would disqualify him/her from employment, and that the provisional employee not be permitted to work alone with children
- requires school employees to obtain such certification every three years
- requires school employees taking employment with a new school employer to obtain new certification
- requires “volunteers having contact with children” to submit to all background requirements but does not prohibit an organization or institution from making additional requirements as part of the clearance process
- grants provisional status to volunteers seeking clearances for up to 30 days
- makes failure to obtain such clearances from the volunteer applicant a third degree misdemeanor

Click here (pdf) for information from the PA Department of Human Services concerning compliance with Act 153. (**PSEA** and **PSBA** also have posted information on compliance.) School districts and public school institutions should consult with their district solicitor for further guidance on this law.

Also in effect now are employee background check requirements for prospective employees under **Act 168 of 2014**. The new law provides direction regarding employment history review processes and for monitoring of electronic public safety and criminal justice information related to the educator. The PDE has provided guidance on the law through a Basic Education Circular (BEC): “Act 168 of 2014 - Procedures and Forms.” Find this information on the **PDE website**. Also, **click here** for a recent PennLINK from the PDE concerning compliance with Act 168.

National News...

Head Start White Paper – The U.S. Senate education panel might be ready to rumble on a rewrite of the No Child Left Behind Act, and the House is expected to follow suit. But it's clear that K-12 isn't the only thing on lawmakers' minds: The House education committee kicked off the new Congress with some background proposals for revising the Head Start Act. The **white paper** was put forth by the committee Wednesday, the day after President Barack Obama made a pitch for helping parents cover the cost of child care in his State of the Union address. It outlines the panel's principles for revising the Head Start Act, which last got a face-lift in 2007. They include: reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens, encouraging local innovation, boosting coordination between Head Start and state and local programs, improving the quality of eligible providers, and enhancing parental engagement to support children's best interests. *Read the rest*

of the story: **“House Education Committee Outlines Head Start Overhaul Recommendations”**(from *educationweek.org*, 1/21/15).

Federal Outlook for Annual Testing – In the same week that the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) held its first hearing on the issue of rewriting No Child Left Behind, two separate groups of lawmakers introduced bills that would also work to dial down aspects of the law’s divisive legacy. In recent weeks, lawmakers have renewed calls to rewrite the controversial school accountability law, which emphasizes standardized testing and doles out penalties for poor scores. While No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, expired in 2007, efforts to overhaul it have failed on several occasions and the law is still in effect today. The Obama administration has offered waivers allowing states to evade some of the law’s more stringent aspects, although states are still required to annually test students in reading and math in grades three through eight, as well as one time while students are in high school. But as legislators continue to hammer out what a rewrite of NCLB might look like, two groups of politicians introduced bills this week that would change the role that law previously established for school standardized testing. *Read the rest of the story:* **“Politicians Introduce Bills That Would Work To Reduce The Role Of School Standardized Testing”** (from *The Huffington Post*, 1/21/15).

Republican Plans for NCLB – According to Politico, “Republicans are hatching an ambitious plan to rewrite No Child Left Behind this year — one that could end up dramatically rolling back the federal role in education and trigger national blowouts over standardized tests and teacher training. NCLB cleared Congress in 2002 with massive bipartisan support but has since become a political catastrophe: The law’s strategy for prodding and shaming schools into improvement proved deeply flawed over time, and its unintended failures have eclipsed its bright spots. Today, NCLB is despised by some parents who blame it on schools for “teaching to the test,” protested by some on the left for promoting education reform and reviled by Republicans in Congress who say the law represents aggressive federal overreach. Now Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and Rep. John Kline of Minnesota, who will lead the Senate and House education committees, are planning to push an overhaul of NCLB at a moment when backlash in the states has reached an all-time high, opening up new political windows to strip the federal role out of education.” *Read the rest of the story:* **“The Plot to Overhaul No Child Left Behind”** (from *politico.com*, 1/2/15).

New Jersey: Overtesting? – The commission ordered by Gov. Chris Christie to study student testing says schools could be giving students too many tests, but the annual state tests given in the spring aren’t necessarily the problem. In a preliminary report released Friday, the Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments in New Jersey recommended that every district review the universe of tests and quizzes being given in classrooms. *Read the rest of the story:* **“N.J. Schools Could Be Over-testing, Christie Study Commission Says”** (from *The Star Ledger*, 1/23/15).

Fiscal Outlook for State and Local Governments – The GAO also recently released the 2014 Update for the State and Local Governments’ Fiscal Outlook. Utilizing simulations of long-term fiscal trends in the state and local government sector, the GAO concludes that “the sector could continue to face a gap between revenue and spending during the next 50 years, and that state and

local governments would need to make substantial policy changes to avoid these fiscal imbalances in the future.” The analysis specifically identifies growing healthcare and public pension costs as the primary drivers of the decline in the sector’s operating balance in the long term. **Click here (pdf)** to read the report.

Kansas: Court Ruling on Funding – Kansas public schools remain illegally underfunded, a three-judge panel said Tuesday, potentially moving the state closer to a budget and constitutional crisis over taxes and state spending. Spending for Kansas public schools “is inadequate from any rational perspective of the evidence,” the judges concluded. But the Shawnee County District Court panel stopped short of saying exactly what would meet the standard of adequate funding. *Read the rest of the story: “Three-Judge Panel in Kansas Calls School Funding Inadequate”* (from *The Kansas City Star*, 12/30/14).

Medicaid and Schools – A recent federal policy reversal, long-sought by states and health care advocates, could enable schools to take a lead role in managing chronic childhood diseases and result in the hiring of many more school nurses. The change, announced quietly and unexpectedly last month by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), will allow public schools to receive Medicaid money for health services they provide to eligible students for the first time since 1997. Once several financing and bureaucratic hurdles are cleared, advocates believe the new policy will improve the coordination of care provided to children with conditions such as asthma, diabetes and mental illness. It will be especially important, they say, for low-income kids who are less likely to have comprehensive medical coverage. But a number of states adopted their own policies to work with the free care policy, and those rules will have to be overturned. *Read the rest of the story: “With Federal Policy Change, More Money for School-Based Health Services”* (from *pewtrusts.org*, 1/22/15).

Poverty in the Nation’s Schools - For the first time in at least 50 years, a majority of U.S. public school students come from low-income families, according to a new analysis of 2013 federal data, a statistic that has profound implications for the nation. The Southern Education Foundation reports that 51 percent of students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in the 2012-2013 school year were eligible for the federal program that provides free and reduced-price lunches. The lunch program is a rough proxy for poverty, but the explosion in the number of needy children in the nation’s public classrooms is a recent phenomenon that has been gaining attention among educators, public officials and researchers. *Read the rest of the story: “Majority of U.S. Public School Students Are in Poverty”* (from *The Washington Post*, 1/16/15).

Quality Counts 2015 – *Education Week* released ***Quality Counts 2015***, the nation’s report card. This year’s report also includes a separate analysis of “the complex landscape that defines early-childhood services and programs in this country, examining how new academic demands and accountability pressures are reshaping the learning environment for young children and the teachers and administrators serving them.”

The 2015 report card grades states on overall performance in a newer, learner form that focuses on outcomes rather than on policy and processes. Grades are provided in three categories: Chance for Success, K-12 Achievement, and School Finance. The nation received an overall grade of “C” on the report card. Pennsylvania earned a “B-“ and ranks 8th. Massachusetts ranked

1st , followed by New Jersey, Maryland, Vermont and New Hampshire. Mississippi ranked last, preceded by New Mexico and Nevada.

The report also includes “Preparing to Launch: Early Childhood’s Academic Countdown,” an original analysis of participation in early-education programs, poverty-based gaps in enrollment, and trends over time.” The Education Week Research Center’s Early Education Index grades the states based on federal data across eight critical indicators. As a whole, the nation earns a “D+” on the index, while half the states earned grades in the “C-“ to “C+” range. Pennsylvania earned a “D+” and ranks 41st on the Index.

The report also shows that, while the number of children enrolled in preschool programs has increased, those from socioeconomically disadvantaged families are less likely to be. Pennsylvania was among 18 states with a 16-20 point preschool poverty gap indicating the differences between enrollment for low-income vs. high-income children, and ranked 7th among the states with the lowest overall Pre-K enrollment.

Another Look at Quality Counts Data – 24/7 Wall St., a Delaware corporation which runs a financial news and opinion company with content delivered over the Internet, last week published an analysis of the Quality Counts 2015 data released this month by Education Week. In its report, the company noted the top ten states in overall achievement – but noted the impact of inequitable school funding as well. “While Pennsylvania school districts spent an average of \$13,653 per pupil in 2013, nearly \$2,000 more per student than the national average, not all school districts could afford to spend so much,” the report notes. “More than 26% of students lived in school districts that spent less per student than the national average, the second-highest proportion among the 10 states with the best schools.” The report goes on to note that, despite the inequities and funding gaps among the commonwealth’s schools, “nevertheless, 88% of students graduated high school with a diploma in four years, well above the national rate of 81%. Test scores for Pennsylvania’s public school students showed strong improvement between 2003 and 2013, rising at one of the faster rates in the country.” *Read the rest of the story: “States with the Best (and Worst) Schools”* (1/9/15).

Guidance on ELLs and Civil Rights – The U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education have issued guidance for school entities in complying with civil rights directives for English Language Learners (ELLs). The guidance is intended to offer guidance to assist SEAs, school districts, and all public schools in meeting their legal obligations to ensure that ELL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and services. The guidance also provides an outline of the legal obligations of school entities to ELL students under the civil rights laws, discusses compliance issues that frequently arise in OCR and DOJ investigations under Title VI and the EEOA, and offers approaches that SEAs and school districts may use to meet their Federal obligations to ELL students. The guidance also includes discussion of how SEAs and school districts can implement their Title III grants and subgrants in a manner consistent with these civil rights obligations. Finally, the guidance discusses the federal obligation to ensure that LEP parents and guardians have meaningful access to district and school-related information. **Click here** to read more.

Proposal for Free Community College – Pres. Obama unveiled a new proposal to make two years of community college free for responsible students across America. “In our growing global economy, Americans need to have more knowledge and more skills to compete,” a blog from the Obama administration noted. “By 2020, an estimated 35 percent of job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree, and 30 percent will require some college or an associate's degree. Students should be able to get the knowledge and the skills they need without taking on decades' worth of student debt.” The plan would require participating states to cover one-quarter of the cost, with the federal government picking up the rest, estimated at \$60 billion per year. (from a **White House blog**, 1/9/15)

Home-School Supervision – Until recently, Pennsylvania had one of the strictest home-school laws in the nation. But in October, after years of campaigning by home-schooling families in the state as well as the Home School Legal Defense Association, a national advocacy group, Pennsylvania relaxed some of its requirements. Pennsylvania educators fought the recent changes, which eliminated the requirement that families submit their children's portfolios, as well as the results of standardized testing in third, fifth and eighth grade, to school district superintendents. The new law also allows parents to certify that their children have completed high school graduation requirements and to issue homegrown diplomas without any outside endorsement. “Here we are loosening standards for a subset of students while at the same time giving them the same credential as all other students,” said Jim Buckheit, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. He noted that the home-school law had been weakened at the same time that public school students were being held to more rigorous academic standards and teachers were being judged by the performance of their students. But home-schooling advocates want to go further, calling for eliminating all requirements governing home-schooling. *Read the rest of the story: “Home Schooling: More Pupils, Less Regulation”* (from *The New York Times*, 1/4/15).