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**Message from Karen Smith, APR, Executive Director**

Dear PenSPRA Membership,

I am very excited to have been selected as your new Executive Director and am so looking forward to meeting and working with all of you. Our schools are facing very difficult times and I will do all I can to provide you with useful resources and timely advice to assist you in your very important work. I believe whole heartedly in the importance of strong communication in our schools and communities and that at no other time is your role more necessary. Teachers educate our youth and public relations professionals educate the greater community. We must protect your roles and look at these difficult times as an opportunity to strengthen our profession. Articles or blurbs you read here in the PenSPRA newsletter can be shared with your communities. I hope they save you some time. Please just credit PenSPRA as a source! Don't hesitate to reach out to me at any time for advice or support.

Sincerely, Karen Smith, APR

**Message from Nicole McGalla, President**

Dear PenSPRA friends,

The new school year is quickly approaching and I am very excited to begin my tenure as your President. I am honored to have been chosen to represent my colleagues in this role. One of the rewarding aspects of our work in school PR is our ability to share with our colleagues and to work as a statewide team. While public education continues to face many challenges, I am confident that we will be able to get through them together. Please utilize PenSPRA as an assistance network. Any time you have a question, feel free to post it on our Linked In users group page. This is a protected environment where only other PenSPRA members can share and view content. As our chairs in the Eastern, Central and Western parts of the states gear up to bring you seminars, workshops and networking opportunities for the 2011-12 school year, I also encourage you to reach out to them and share your ideas for presentations or offer to

present a workshop on a particular topic. We can all learn from each other and I hope you will consider becoming more involved in PenSPRA in a leadership capacity this upcoming year.

Wishing you a wonderful start to a new school year filled with promise,  
Nicole McGalla  
Director Community Relations and Development, Parkland School District, 2011-2013  
PenSPRA President

### Legislative Update

SB1, the school choice bill, failed to come to an agreement between the Senate and the House in June and was tabled until after the summer recess. The Senate version focused on poor students in failing schools that would expand over four years to middle income students. The House version only focused on poor students in failing schools and expanded the existing Educational Improvement Tax Credit or EITC, program. Committee hearings have begun again and the bill is on the fall legislative agenda.

### Summary of Charter School Report

Charter schools are a viable and important option for the students of Pennsylvania. The school choice debate has brought charter schools into the limelight and raised some questions about how they operate. As you may know, school districts are mandated to send their local cost per pupil expenditure to the receiving charter school for any student who leaves the district to attend a charter school. This requirement became an even greater burden at the local level after Governor Corbett's budget which cut the state subsidy school districts had been receiving for charter school students.

In order to explain the impact of charter schools to their communities, 26 superintendents from Carbon, Monroe, Pike, Northampton and Lehigh counties turned their attention to the charter schools in their area. Since taxpayer money funds charter schools, the superintendents felt it was important that taxpayers understand the whole situation. In a lengthy report, they compared the PSSA scores of the charter schools to their own districts, and also reviewed the financial data of the charter schools. In summary, this data shows that in the great majority of cases public schools are outperforming charter schools by a significant margin. Charter schools are also holding undesignated fund balances of up to and over 7 million dollars.

The issue here is accountability. Public school districts are held very accountable for both student performance and costs by their local communities. The operations of charter schools, governed by PDE, are much less understood by the general public and are complicated by the sometimes aggressive marketing of charter schools.

We have [posted a link](#) to the full report on the PenSPRA website, but for your

purposes at the local school district level, the three main results of the study are:

- Charter schools do cost taxpayers money and as a result of the new PA budget are now fully funded at the local level.
- Funding that leaves the local school district for the charter school moves under the jurisdiction of PDE and is less accountable than at the local level.
- In spite of this mandated funding switch, public schools are performing better on the PSSA's than charter schools overall.

### **LinkedIn**

Did you know PenSPRA has a LinkedIn group? It is a great opportunity to collaborate with other members, share best practices, highlight events and discuss the news in between your regional meetings. You can request to join through the LinkedIn website.

### **9/11 Anniversary reminder**

Just a quick reminder that September 11, 2011 is the ten year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. You will likely receive phone calls from the media about what plans your schools have to mark the anniversary.

### **News from Around the State and Nation**

Good summary of the status of the School Choice bill:

<http://paindependent.com/2011/08/updated-tomalis-testing-should-be-required-of-voucher-students/>

A new study finds vouchers are not raising student achievement:

[http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20110808\\_Finding\\_that\\_vouchers\\_have\\_little\\_impact\\_on\\_student\\_achievement\\_do\\_not\\_deter\\_advocates.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20110808_Finding_that_vouchers_have_little_impact_on_student_achievement_do_not_deter_advocates.html)

No Child Left Behind is creeping back into headlines...

<http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/duncan-states-will-get-school-testing-wa>

And another version of the NCLB story...

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/education/08educ.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=1&ref=education](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/08/education/08educ.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1&ref=education)

Be aware that the allegations of cheating on standardized tests in Georgia are now having repercussions here in Pennsylvania:

<http://www.abc27.com/story/15066836/ed-dept-looks-into-possible-cheating-on-pa-tests>

Some PA schools will pilot a new teacher evaluation program:

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11220/1165984-298-0.stm>

The blogging teacher is back in the headlines. The lesson here—get a social media policy in place, pronto!

[http://www.phillyburbs.com/news/local/burlington\\_county\\_times\\_news/cb-blogging-teacher-has-right-to-return/article\\_e69a3461-4680-50b4-9b1f-89f8d419fe47.html](http://www.phillyburbs.com/news/local/burlington_county_times_news/cb-blogging-teacher-has-right-to-return/article_e69a3461-4680-50b4-9b1f-89f8d419fe47.html)

### **Job Opportunity**

Communications Specialist— August 19, 2011 (deadline). Full-time, year-round position beginning as soon as possible after expiration of deadline. Bachelor's degree and 2-5 years experience in related field required. Must have excellent writing and communication skills as well as experience with a digital camera. Proficiency in Microsoft Office and Adobe's Creative Suite including Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign required. Assist with the writing and design of MCIU publications and contracted work with school districts. Create marketing plans for MCIU divisions and provide appropriate communications support. Salary \$45,000. APPLICATION PROCEDURES: Your completed application must be received in the Human Resources Division by the indicated deadline. Applications may be downloaded from our website; Click here for application:

<http://www.mciu.org/Divisions/HumanResources/ApplicationProcess/tabid/97/Default.aspx>. Contact Mrs. Flowers at [\(610\) 755-9307](tel:6107559307) for more information.