

## **Focus on Budgets and Fair Funds Distributions – by Jim Henderson**

In the 2017 Pennsylvania Rural and Small Schools Conference in State College, featured speakers focused the program on marketing, budgets, meeting the ESSA requirements, and fair funding and accountability.

Bonnie Leedy, former Public Relations Director of GoDaddy.com emphasized that Marketing Matters. Most people are unaware of the successes in schools. We need to focus on sharing ideas with the community. We cannot let “other people” tell our story, since what reaches you is about what is “wrong” with our schools. We need to broadcast our successes, engage parents, and engage the community and the legislators.

Chris Wakely, Executive Director of the House Education Committee (D) acknowledged that most rural school districts do not receive fair distribution of money. With new chairs in both House and Senate Education Committees, he expects basic education and special education to see modest increases in funding, but there is a likelihood that there will be significant cuts in transportation funds. New legislation is starting to change funding and authorization for charter schools. Also, there is clear bi-partisan dislike for enforced testing for a student to be able to graduate.

Eugene DePasquale, PA Auditor General said his organization performs over 5000 audits each year, including all school districts. This year the state budget is facing a \$3B deficit. Something must change the education retirement system (PSERS). Also, we need real charter school reform, both in basic education fund reimbursement and special education. A problem in the special education formula for charter schools results in significant overcharge to taxpayers through our property taxes. This year our school budget includes \$3.2M we are required to pay to charter schools.

Leslie Finnan, senior legislative analyst for Public Policy AASA brought out that the proposed federal budget cuts basic education to public schools by 13% (\$9B) while increasing Title 1 (low income schools) and School Choice (Charter and Cyber Charter schools) by over \$2.4B. The 2018 budget for PA could see deep cuts. Implementation of Every School Succeeds Act (ESSA) starts this August.

Adam Schott, special assistant to the PA Secretary of Education focused on the state’s incorporation of the ESSA requirements. Key features he highlighted include the drive for less testing time so there could be more teaching/learning, and possible revisions to school accountability.

Dr. Terry Madonna, Director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs said that small town rural America is different in context. Hillary Clinton only won 2 counties in PA west of the Susquehanna. Trump won the disconnected, disenchanting working class majority. Today Democrats represent urban America, and Republicans rural. He expects medical marijuana to be approved nation-wide in this decade. The polarization of liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans will continue, resulting in the Governor and legislature not working together.

Pedro Rivera, PA Secretary of Education is focused on graduation requirements. He does not see alignment of examination requirements and graduation rates. Graduates with high college-readiness standards and high industry readiness standards succeed more. To improve teacher readiness and success, he recommends that new teachers have internships with excellent master teachers for their first year. Accountability must include community needs and stakeholder inputs. We need to hold schools and ourselves accountable. He recommends that we advocate standards for graduation, community involvement, and teacher preparedness.

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