

Continuous Life-Long Learning - Even for School Board Members

- Jim Henderson

Several Gettysburg Area School Board members attended the April meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS). We saw the capabilities of many vendors, and received new information and ideas from seven highly qualified speakers.

Pedro Rivera, Pennsylvania Education Secretary, recognizes that the rural small schools have many different needs than the larger, big city schools. Special education, paying for charter schools while maintaining their own class rooms, and difficulty hiring Advanced Placement teachers are some of the issues. Starting with strategies, we need accountability that meets the needs of students, then establish goals. We must highlight and celebrate successes. Great schools learn and share best practices.

Hannah Barrick, Director of Advocacy, Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials said the use of the new funding distribution formula must be reauthorized in legislation each year until it is put into the school code. Also, nearly 400 districts await fund reimbursement from the state for capital projects (PLANCON).

Dr. John Hill, Executive Director National Rural Education Association, showed by many examples the value of individuals focusing on their talents and doing extraordinary things. All it takes is a burning desire and persistence.

Johnna Weller, EdD, Director, Professional Development, Discovery Education, wants us to focus on planning strategic vision. IT'S ABOUT THE KIDS. Since most of student reading is no longer in the libraries, but on-line, it is vital that students be skeptical of what they read. Teachers and students must be given, and use technology tools. Think, what the world will look like to today's kindergarteners when they graduate in 12 years. Now learning must be active, authentic, collaborative, constructive, flexible, and goal-directed.

Ron Cowell, President of The Education Policy and Leadership Center, reports Pennsylvania now lacks sufficient certified teachers. Recent dramatic changes include decrease in forward-thinking and decreased commitment to science in education. The state's support of public education has dwindled from 54% to about 30% since the 1980s, most of the reduction in the last ten years. This has created the need for increasing revenue at the local level through property tax increases. We are a long way from where we should be, with a funding increase of \$1.2 Billion needed. Mr. Cowell said that the legislature has failed to deal with the big issues, with Pennsylvania's funding for education 48th in the nation.

Michael Churchill, The Public Interest Law Center, discussed the School Funding Lawsuit filed in Commonwealth Court against PA State Officials for failing to maintain a fair and adequate system of public education. The complaint says that state officials have adopted an irrational school funding system that does not deliver the essential resources that students need, and discriminates against children based on where they live and the wealth of their communities.

Dr. G. Terry Madonna, Director Center for Politics and Public Affairs, Franklin and Marshall College, discussed the coming state and national elections. In the past few years, more Pennsylvanians are voting straight ticket. The Republican party is facing a potential major split.

In addition to this, Gettysburg received one of eight \$500.00 scholarships presented by PARSS for school districts to grant to students.

Jim Henderson is a member of the Gettysburg Area School District Board of Directors.