

**PARSS 2002 LEADERSHIP FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION
PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOLS
ANNUAL MEETING
APRIL 25, 26, 2002
RAMADA INN
STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA**

WHAT: A variety of session topics will be covered: early childhood, cyber schools, school funding, legislation, current political affairs, and legal issues

WHEN: Beginning: Thursday, APRIL 25, 2002 at 9:00 A.M. Concluding: Friday, APRIL 26, 2002 at 12:00

WHERE: All sessions will be held at the RAMADA INN in State College. Accommodations are available at the RAMADA INN. Accommodations are not included in the registration fees. Phone number for reservations is as follows: 814-238-3001

* *Please specify PARSS Conference when making reservations.

If you are unable to secure a reservation at the RAMADA INN, you may call:

- Toftrees Resort- 1-800-252-3551
- Atherton Hilton- 1-800-832-0132
- Nittany Lion Inn- 1-800-233-7505
- Best Western Inn 1-800-635-1177

REGISTRATION FEE: \$125.00 EACH FOR FIRST FOUR PERSONS AND \$40.00 FOR EACH ADDITIONAL PERSON
\$155.00 EACH FOR NON-MEMBER SCHOOLS, FEE INCLUDES 2 LUNCHESES, 1 BANQUET, 1 BREAKFAST AND BEVERAGE BREAKS

Each attendee will receive a complimentary PARSS conference kit

Please send in your registration and make your hotel reservations as early as possible

Be a nice person and bring a board member, business administrator, teacher, or community resident

----- (Please Tear off and return with payment) -----

SEND REGISTRATION TO:

Dr. David Monsour
PARSS Conference Chair
Brookville Area School District
P.O. Box 479
Brookville, PA 15825-0479

SCHOOL DISTRICT _____ **Member/NonMember**
(circle one)

REGISTRATION FOR: (NAMES) (please put titles, Mr. Mrs. Ms. Dr. and Position)

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____ (Make out check to PARSS) _____
Phone No. _____ Email _____

(Registration will also be conducted the morning of the conference from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m.)

Please FAX cancellations to Dr. David Monsour, Brookville Area School District at 814-849-6842 prior to April 5, 2002. Refunds will not be made after that date.



JANUARY 2002

“Quality education for all children of Pennsylvania”

VOL. 16 NO. 1

MCKELVEYS, RURAL SCHOLARSHIP DONORS, TO SPEAK AT PARSS ANNUAL MEETING

“In this country, if you make money, you have a responsibility to give it back. I wasn’t interested in writing a check to the Heart Association. I really wanted to do something entrepreneurial.” Andy McKelvey was recently quoted in an article in the Tribune-Review. Both Andy and his wife Dena have targeted students in rural Pennsylvania (as well as rural N.Y. and West Virginia) to award full scholarships to go on to four year colleges.

The first year has seen this program extended to 11 school districts in economically challenged rural areas. Sixteen full scholarships were awarded and those students are presently in colleges and universities across the Commonwealth. The qualifications to receive the award begins with “entrepreneurial spirit.” Andy McKelvey took his career delivering eggs door to door, refurbishing a

movie theater in New Wilmington, the home of Westminster College (which he attended) to the largest yellow page advertising company in the world. Part of his TMP corporation includes Monster.Com, the largest job search site on the internet.

Scholarship recipients must also be in the top 50% of their class, agree to do 80 hours of community service in their home towns during the summer, work 10 hours per week, while at school, and also help to mentor other students. The program has expanded in its second year to over 90 students in the three states. The McKelveys have created differing levels of scholarships and a mentoring program that will help to identify other students who might not have the funds to go to college.

Dena McKelvey is the chief executive of the McKelvey Foundation. She does all of the research to identify the school districts, the appropriate colleges or universities, visits each of those sites and organizes the interviews. Andy McKelvey interviews the majority of the students. He believes that no capable young man or woman should be denied a college education because of economic reasons. His aim is to have 1000 McKelvey Scholars go to school each year.

Happy New Year!

Retirement Woes

While those who have retired prior to this year await the outcome of whether there will be a cost of living increase for them, the new retirement law has cast a shadow over school district finances. Funding for the new benefits will now require an increase in the contributions by the local school districts and state from 1.09% to 5.64% - more than five fold. According to an article in the Harrisburg Patriot on December 16, 2001, some rural school districts such as West Perry, will increase their expenses for this line item from \$68,112 to \$368,290. Greencastle-Antrim in Franklin County would increase its contributions from \$62,019 to \$335, 346.

School administrators interviewed in the article have said that as a result of these increased expenses, there would most certainly have to be cuts made in programs and/or increase in local real estate taxes.

CYBER WITNESS

Common Pleas Courts in Butler County and now Adams County have issued opinions on the legality of cyber charter schools. The first case in Butler County said that it has not been persuaded that this is not just a method of home schooling done by having students sit at a computer terminal in their homes. In the Adams County case, the court went further by saying that the Einstein Cyber School is not, in fact, a charter school. In each of these cases, the persuasive arguments have been made by PSBA Attorney Mike Levin and the primary witness, whether in person, or video, has been Joe Bard. As Commissioner of Basic Education (Assistant Secretary of Education for Basic Education), Mr. Bard has been extremely involved in both the creation of the current home

schooling law and Pennsylvania’s first attempts at distance education.

In the early 80’s, he funded a program called “teleteaching” which began with a course taught from Southern Tioga High School to Heber City High School in Utah. Following these courses, the program was expanded statewide. Therefore, Mr. Bard has been tapped as an expert witness in all of these cases. He will soon appear, on video, in the Downingtown (Chester County) case.

There is a concern that the cases at the local court level will not be instructive in terms of how they might be resolved in the Commonwealth or Supreme Court, which are certainly not local courts. However, if there are enough decisions by local courts, that may be a turning point.



JOE SAYS...

Some Things We Learned

As statewide organizations go, I think we who work for PARSS (Arnold Hillman, Woody Sites and me), know pretty much what our 170 member districts are concerned about, at any given time. Likewise, we work hard at keeping all of you abreast of what is going on that does, or will, affect you and your schools.

Our relatively small size is one reason we are able to do this: we know you, in most cases on a first name basis. A second is our popular, and growing

web site, , which we use very interactively. A third, if I can judge by the amount of conversation going on, is the Annual Meeting. A fourth reason is that we, at least once and sometimes twice a year hold a series of meetings around Pennsylvania, which many of you attend. At them, we put out a lot of information on topics that we think are important. We also hear about many issues and specific situations of which we were not aware.

The three of us have just finished a round of eight meetings that literally covered the state. They were small and informal. A total of 90 superintendents, business managers, principals and board members participated. The evaluations we received support my feeling that they were a success.

Using this random, self-selected group as a sample, I will comment on a few of the state issues that were on the minds of the people with whom we talked. First and foremost, cyber schools have everyone's attention, and have achieved an almost uniform state of outrage. Their inadequacy as a primary form of instruction is the foremost reason for the anger. If homeschoolers wish to risk their children's educational future, they are allowed to do so by law. But to allow cyber home schooling as a form of public education really angers the professional educators with whom I have spoken.

Add to that, the Secretary of Education's scorched earth policy regarding the withholding of funds from districts that refuse to willingly submit to highway robbery, and you have a very alienated group of educators and taxpayers. I myself have never seen such zealous pursuit of an anti-public educational goal. It points out the dangers of appointing ideologues to positions of governmental responsibility. It also raises the question of where Governor Schweiker is on this issue. We knew where Tom Ridge stood. If it could be seen as an alternative to traditional public education, he was for it, but the new guy in the big office has yet to indicate he is aware of cyber schools as an issue. More importantly, it tells us how important it is to get the people that wish to replace him on the record as to their positions on cyber schools.

The dreadful special education funding situation continues to be a major stress point. The amount of

money that is going to high cost placements for severely disabled kids must be staggering, and there doesn't seem to be much interest at either the state or local level in finding responsible, less costly alternatives. Advocates for kids with disabilities who, in the past, tore up the pea patch in Harrisburg, are focused on demanding appropriate services, not on whether the system is properly funded, or who is paying the bill. I really think that this is a situation like that with the basic education subsidy: the lines of communication between the field and the executive branch of state government have been cut for so long, the moat filled and the drawbridge up, that people have stopped trying. Satisfying perhaps to the perpetrators of the stonewall approach, but disgraceful behavior by those charged with the welfare of the people of Pennsylvania. The effort needed to not govern the state is roughly the same as that needed to actually govern it.

We spoke to the leaders of a number of districts that are in the first group having their teachers tested. Many have had experiences that would be humorous if we didn't know how the test's instigators plan to use the data. It is just the latest in an elaborate chain of "Gotchas!" created by the folks who brought you Standard and Poors. What page would your students be on today if, years ago, state government had adopted a policy of actually working to improve public education instead of expanding all that time and money to obstruct and discredit it?

In Pennsylvania, it really matters who we elect as Governor. The office bestows real power, and the occupant wields it for good or ill. Policy topics that are not on the winner's list of priorities won't, as history tells us, get addressed. The challenge of the task of getting our items on the list is complicated by the fact that it is being compiled now, not after the nomination. So now is the time to do whatever we can to assure that genuine priority issues for public education are on it.

Best wishes for a very good New Year. My personal wish is that on our next trip around the state, we are able to talk about positive things emanating from Harrisburg, instead of how we are putting our best efforts into the struggle to keep bad things from happening.

THE WELL BEING OF RURAL CHILDREN IN PA

Sometimes we would prefer not to know some things about our kids in rural Pennsylvania. We understand that many youngsters come to school without a meal, or that families are trying hard and struggling to get by. We try our best to make things good for the kids. However we try, we can never do enough. These are some of the things that we are up against as reported by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. The study was done by Bob Feir, former Executive Director of the State Board of Education. A press conference was held on Thursday November 6, 2001. Joe Bard, Executive Director of PARSS spoke about the study and the event.

The study describes counties as being rural, if 67% of the population is rural. That eliminates a number of counties that we might term rural, such as Cameron and Elk. Saving that, there are over 500,000 children in rural PA. "One child in six lives in poverty. . . Doctors and Dentists are scarce . . . Schools, strapped for funds and burdened by higher transporta-

tion costs- trail the state in spending and student instruction."

However, despite many hardships, schools seem to be doing a fine job. Rural school test scores on the PSSA are squarely in the middle of the state. Rural schools. "outpace or keep up with their urban and suburban counterparts in availability of computers, internet access, distance education and library services." Class size in rural areas is generally on a par with most state school districts.

The Pennsylvania Partnership for Children suggests that there are a number of things that can counteract the problems with education in a rural area. Those might be: parent education, quality preschool and school readiness programs, connections to health services, small classes, and full-day kindergarten. These, among others will help rural schools to maintain and improve the "Quality of Education for ALL children in Pennsylvania." See the complete report on the PARSS website www.parss.org.

IT'S NOT THE SAME OLD SITE

If you have not seen the PARSS' website over the last month, you are really missing something. Although past sites have won some awards, this one tops even our best efforts. The site is organized specifically for a rural set of school districts. It is not set up to go looking on secondary sites to get to a site that might be of interest. The page itself will take you to almost anything that you could imagine.

There are sections on research in rural education, grantwriting, legislative activities, the PARSS newsletters, a site completely dedicated to teachers, administrators, school board members and other staff called PSPATR (it's right on the bottom). There are links to job search sites, educational organizations, even the weather and meta-search engines like Dogpile and Big Momma. You can search Beaucoup for thousands of search engines on any topic.

We are proud of our site. The proof of the pudding is whether or not you use it. If you have any questions about the site, there is an online search component. We wish you every success in your search for the truth. It's out there somewhere.

TEACHER TESTING

As "Joe Says," the PARSS Institutes across the state told us that many school districts who were in the first wave of teacher testing (20% of school districts) had technical problems with the exam. They were further interested in the results of the test in terms of how it would improve the pedagogy of teachers across the Commonwealth. According to the the test's credo, Pennsylvania has some of the finest teachers in the country. This test was created to help teachers get even better.

In a study commissioned by the Keystone Research Center, testing specialist Barbara Plake was asked to evaluate the Pennsylvania Development Assistance Program (PDAP) the avowed purpose of which is to improve professional development. It will not be used to identify individual teachers who might need assistance. PARSS was able to secure a preview copy of the study that will be out in the middle of January. Some of Ms. Plake's preliminary conclusions are these:

- "The tests have been developed using sound measurement practices."
- For most teachers, the test actually measures general reading and math skills, rather than the subject matter that they teach.
- The test does not measure what teachers do in the classroom.
- The test does not indicate what teachers actually know but how they compare to others in the Commonwealth.
- There is no standard for what the term "substantial number" of teachers who require additional professional opportunities.
- The electronic system could not handle the volume.
- There is also some question of test security because of the test administration window.

PARSS will review the final draft of the study and continue to report its conclusions.

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