



# PARSS

Pennsylvania  
Association of  
Rural and  
Small  
Schools

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*"Quality education for all children of Pennsylvania"*

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## Distance Education: The Great Equalizer

**Dana R. Baker**  
**Superintendent, Fannett-Metal School District**

Superintendents are well aware that it is very easy to become caught up in the vacuum of the fiscal, personnel, school board, and many other endless tasks associated with this leadership role. It is well worth their time and effort to escape the shackles of the "district office" and visit classes. On one recent "walk about" I visited a class using video-conferencing. There were approximately 10 students receiving a course in college speech as an "early to college" elective from the Chestnut Ridge School District. The course was offered through an agreement with Allegheny Community College at Chestnut Ridge. What made this particularly unique was that Fannett-Metal SD also wanted to participate and to make a long story short, the semester long program was delivered through the use of state of the art technology linking Fannett-Metal to Chestnut Ridge using a synchronous format.

The concept of education at a distance is not a new one. It first appeared in the North American colonies on March 20, 1728. An advertisement appeared in the Boston Gazette for lessons in shorthand by mail. Many years later a correspondence system for women was established by Anna Eliot Ticknor in 1873, who was purported to be the mother of correspondence study. She founded and supervised "The Society to Encourage Studies at Home" for a period of 24 years. This program, although not affiliated with a formal institution of study, is credited with educating over 7,000 women in the areas of liberal arts and sciences.

Bossert (1997) explained that education, as an institution has remained virtually unchanged systemically by the transportation revolution of the twentieth cen-

tury. But the revolution in telecommunications, according to Bossert, will not pass education by without significant change in the instructional methods used and will impact the total instructional delivery system. The current movement by educators to provide distance education venues is supported by the fact that in 1987 fewer than ten states were promoting distance education, but by 1992 all fifty states had a formal agenda for the development of distance learning.

The trend to the increased use of distance education will not disappear and will continue to cause the development of policy to accommodate the need. Widespread use of distance technologies in secondary schools, colleges, universities, and workplaces demonstrate their increasing importance to those institutions and their learners.

During a recent visit to a dear friend, I noticed that the corner of his office contained videoconference equipment. My friend is a detective for a municipal police force and of course I had to inquire why equipment used in educational settings would be located in a police interrogation room. He quickly explained that it is much more efficient to access public defenders, district attorneys, judges, and other police agencies using this technology than any thing else they have attempted and, he added, far less expensive too!

In a paper addressing compressed video technologies for business applications Bishop, Leddick and Black (1991) concluded:

This advancement in technology (compressed digital video) will cause significant changes in the telecommunications industry and in the handling of video signals over

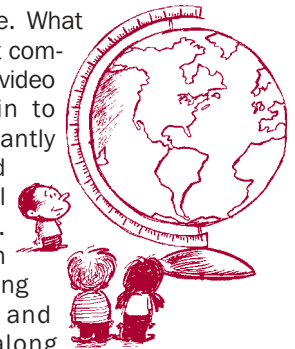
the next decade. What is certain is that compressed digital video will soon begin to impact significantly business and educational television users.

This innovation will offer exciting new benefits and capabilities along with new challenges to effectively implement the new technology.

The United States Navy made first use of distance education technology on a large scale, connecting 6 different training sites from Maine to Florida in the early 90's.

Students, regardless of financial or geographic barriers, do not have to face an abyss of educational inequity if planning, minimal resources, and flexibility exist within your district. Technology, such as video-conferencing, on-line courses, and similar venues narrow the curriculum gap that is so evident across our beautiful state. Costs associated with basic instructional delivery using distance education are very reasonable and are subject to federal education rate discounts based on district poverty. Also, numerous grant sources are available for purchase of the needed equipment. Discover the possibilities and give technology a chance to ease some of your curriculum problems.

If you have any questions, or are interested in developing a distance learning program, please contact me at this number: 717-349-7172, or at this email address: dbaker@fmsd.k12.pa.us.





## Viva la Difference'

Changes in administration conjure up visions of big changes in the way the state is governed, and the way programs are run. There is usually the implication, if not the reality, of a different philosophy and style in the way public education is treated.

For those yearning for this to be true because you loathed what we have lived with for eight years, I counsel cautious optimism. Wanting things to be better is human, and far better than expecting them to get worse, but the only guarantee my experience with five Pennsylvania governors will let me give you is this: Things will be different.

Governor-Elect Rendell has impressed me, as I know he has most of you, with his understanding of the needs of children, and of what it takes to provide them with a quality education. He wants to see school funding reformed in

a way that decreases inequity, as well as property taxes, and provides such things as early childhood programs, full-day kindergarten and smaller class sizes. He wants to see students learn in good schools that were built, or renovated, with more financial participation from the state than is currently the case. Rendell knows that the Department of Education needs to be a service agency to the 501 school districts in fact, not fiction. His commitment to these and other things, such as enhancing the role of the classroom teacher, is stated with passion and firmness.

I want Ed Rendell to be the champion that public education has needed for so long. It has always been my belief that without a leader with the qualities mentioned above, who will make the accomplishment of these very important, very difficult matters the most important thing he or she has to do while they are in office, it won't happen.

I believe he will stay the course. This won't be easy given the deficit state government is running, and the bleak outlook for the economy, temporary as that should be. He has said that the things he wants for education won't happen until the taxpayers of the state can sustain them, but they will happen.

The task doesn't get any easier in light of the fact that he will be the first modern Governor to take office with both houses of the General Assembly controlled by the opposite political party. Not just controlled, but strongly controlled. Finding common ground and negotiation will be required strategy if progress is to be made. While there are some very different viewpoints and beliefs between the leadership of the Republican caucuses and the Governor-Elect, there are people who can, and will, work with him on these issues. While their majorities are substantial it should not be assumed that all of those legislators are in opposition. Also, Rendell comes to office with a strong majority of voters behind him. Strongest in fact in the counties where much of the power in those caucuses comes from.

An urgent warning: because we can feel, for the first time in years, that education has a friend in the Governor's Office, we cannot, we must not, lay aside the part we have taken on as defend-

ers, supporters and exhorters for what is right, necessary and imperative for our children's futures. Pardon the military analogies, but the battle isn't over. In a very real way it has just begun. What went before was a struggle to build an army, equip it, and get it into the field.

Rural legislators are a very large part of both Democratic and Republican caucuses, particularly in the House of Representatives. These folks need a lot of attention from the pro-education forces. They need to understand the issues (don't assume that they do), and they need to know that their constituents understand them, and are watching to see what they do about them. While your roles in this may vary, depending on who you are, what your community is like, what your legislators are like, and who you know, or don't know, be in no doubt that you have a role in this epic drama.

## A PARSS BROCHURE

Some of you have asked from time to time, particularly membership renewal time, if we have something that tells what PARSS is and does that can be shared with their board. We do have several items for that purpose, in addition to the powerful, pleading letter I will write to them myself.

Something must be working because we now stand at 180 member districts, the largest number we have ever had. While we are proud of it, we don't take it for granted and are always looking for different ways to serve our members.

Recently we undertook the design and production of a brochure that would be helpful in telling folks who we are and what we do. These are now available, and if you would like a supply write, call or email Joe Bard with the number you want, and it will be done.



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# WHERE'S THE MONEY?

*by Ron Henry, Director of the Committee on House Resolution 42*

What could be more appropriate than to take a peek at year-to-date revenues for the Commonwealth on election day?

As we've seen in the media, and depending on who is doing the counting, the state's '02-'03 budget has around a billion dollars in it from one-time revenues — from commitment of a goodly portion of the Rainy Day Fund, borrowing, changes in law (such as speeding up the collection of unclaimed property) and other things. That money, even if you look between the cushions in the Senate dining room and vacuum under the seat in Mark Schweiker's car, won't be around for the new governor and General Assembly to dump into the '03-'04 budget come spring of next year.

That is a lot to be concerned about, but the *real* question is how Pennsylvania is doing in terms of the day in, day out, business of tax collection.

The answer: *not all that great.*

The state's General Fund is where

most of the fiscal action is, accounting for over \$18 billion of its revenues, and as of the end of the first quarter the General Fund is running about 1.9% below estimates. Percentage-wise, that doesn't seem like much, but it projects out to a shortfall of over \$350,000,000 through June 30, 2003.

In Beaver Falls, where I grew up, that is thought of as a lot of money.

The bad news is that - in terms of revenues at least - a possible \$350,000,000 shortfall actually is the *good* news.

September, due to estimated tax payments, generally yields more than the other first quarter months, and this year it accounted for 38.7% of the General Fund's income.

If you think that sounds good....

*You would be wrong.*

Returning to the misty past - the 1999-2000 fiscal year - the days of old when the stock market was hot and Enron was on everyone's "buy" list - September

made up almost 41% of the General Fund's receipts.

The message seems to be that, absent an upswing in the national economy, the \$350,000,000 revenue hole is only a starting point in terms of bad news for the new guy in the front office. On the other hand, the pay isn't bad, you have a nice view of the park from your office and someone will go the Capitol Cafeteria to get lunch for you.

The revenue gap will make it more difficult to match the rhetoric about not increasing taxes with reality, and while some Rainy Day money is still around, it looks like another monsoon season ahead.

In political terms, a large dose of *really* bad news is bad for everyone who has to deal with it, and shared adversity can be a powerful stimulant to action. Those who have to show up in Harrisburg come January eventually could come to recognize that.

Stay tuned.

# South Central Regional Consortium Develops Online Curriculum

*by Tony Payne, Coordinator of the SCRC*

The South Central Regional Consortium for distance learning was formed in 1994. The vision of the SCRC is to develop a network of school districts, colleges, museums, and other entities to share resources among the consortium. With this philosophy, the SCRC provides courses and learning experiences for students that they would not have access to without the SCRC and video conferencing. Classes are sent in real time over ISDN lines using video conferencing equipment. Students at far sites can see the teacher, and interact with the teacher or other students immediately. The SCRC employs a 48 port video bridge, which enables as many as 45 districts to participate in a single event. The bridge allows the consortium members to monthly curriculum meetings, without leaving their district.

The SCRC has connected over 5000 students to classes in areas of curriculum that are not offered in their local districts. The SCRC has also provided staff devel-

opment to over 12,000 teachers throughout the state about the Pennsylvania Academic Standards. The SCRC is one of the most active distance-learning consortiums in the state of Pennsylvania and possibly the nation.

The member districts govern the SCRC. Each district helps formulate the policies and procedures of the consortium. Recently, the SCRC voted to develop online courses, courses available through the Internet. Each district contributes resources, time and talent to the development of online courses. The SCRC believes that collaboration between school districts is the most effective, successful approach for leveraging the expensive technology for maximizing learning opportunities for students and the member districts.

The SCRC Online development committee is focusing on course development in K-8 math, science, reading and social studies. The online development committee expects to have this elementary cur-

riculum available for the 2003-04 school year. Mr. Jed Friedrichsen has been named Director for Online Course Development and Training, and heads the development of the SCRC Online School project. Mr. Friedrichsen comes to this project as one of the primary developers of class.com, formerly the Independent Study High School at the University of Nebraska, a company that offers online courses and a high school diploma program to public education. The SCRC Online's goal is to use Pennsylvania Teachers to develop a complete K-12 curriculum for Pennsylvania students. The online curriculum will be made available to SCRC participating districts.

For more information on PARSS relationship with the SCRC Online School Project call, Allan Schoonover, President of PARSS, at 814 422-8814, Jed Friedrichsen at 814 386-2585 or Tony Payne at 814 542-2501. You may also email Allan at [aschoono@pennsvalley.org](mailto:aschoono@pennsvalley.org), Jed at [jfriedrichsen@tiu11.org](mailto:jfriedrichsen@tiu11.org) and Tony at [tpayne@tiu11.org](mailto:tpayne@tiu11.org).



# RURAL COSTS LESS

**By Mark Lino**

**from the National Rural Education Association Newsletter**

Total expenses on a rural child in real terms have increased from 1960 to 2000. Food expenses have decreased, but health care and child care/education expenses have increased more. These trends highlight the importance of updating the expenditure base of USDA's cost of raising a child series.

Since 1960, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided annual estimates of family expenditures on children in both urban and rural areas. USDA's annual childrearing expense estimates are used in four major ways:

- Determining state child support guidelines.
- Determining state foster care payments.
- By courts to appraise damages arising from personal injury or wrongful death cases.
- In educational programs for anyone considering having children.

For urban areas, childrearing expenses are estimated for families in four regions (Northeast, South, Midwest, and West). For this study, the

four urban regions were combined into a single overall urban average. Rural areas are places of fewer than 2,500 people outside a Metropolitan Statistical Area and cover the entire country.

## Expenditures on Children by Rural families

Family expenditures on children are less in rural than in urban areas. For middle-income families, those in rural areas spent \$156,720 to

raise a child up to age 18, whereas those in urban areas spent \$169,130. Housing is the primary reason for the cost discrepancy. Housing, which accounts for the largest share of childrearing expenses, represents a smaller percentage and dollar amount for rural families (\$44,190 in middle-income families) than urban families (\$58,790). Food expenses (the second largest childrearing cost) for a child are also lower in rural areas.

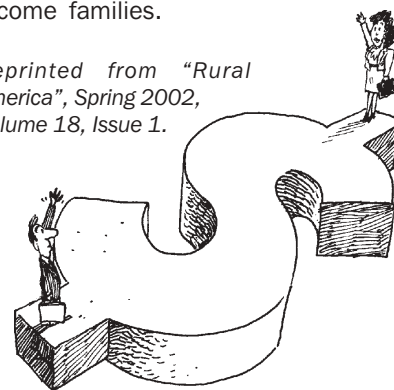
Transportation (the third largest childrearing cost) and health care expenses for a child are higher in rural than urban areas. For rural middle-income families, these figures are \$23,890 and \$11,350. Families in rural areas have longer distance to drive when they make

child-oriented travel and may need a second vehicle because of the presence of children. Also, families in rural areas may have less health insurance coverage so have to pay more out of the pocket for health care.

As household income rises for both rural and urban families, so do expenditures per child. Rural and urban families in the lower income group spent \$111,930 and \$124,670 over 18 years - or about \$6,930 per year for urban families. Rural and urban families in the higher income group spent \$230,460 and \$242,600, or \$12,800 per year (rural and \$13,480 per year (urban).

While total expenditures to raise a child in a rural family has increased since 1960 overall expenditures to raise a child in a rural family still trail urban costs for higher, middle, and lower income families.

*Reprinted from "Rural America", Spring 2002, Volume 18, Issue 1.*



## PARSS Regional Meetings Concluded

Executive Director Joe Bard and Assistant Executive Director Woody Sites went on a 7 meeting circle of Pennsylvania to meet and talk with PARSS members. Nearly 80 of the 180 member districts found their way to one of these gatherings, and they heard from many more who couldn't attend. Woody said "I was really excited by the enthusiasm the attendees showed for their work, and for PARSS. This organization has a very loyal constituency, and they are very focused on what needs to be done to improve educational opportunities for their students".

Part of the agenda was to structure a short list of education related priorities for the incoming administration. This was accomplished and the results will be shared with the membership on the website, and with the new administration as it begins to take charge in Harrisburg.