



# PARSS

Pennsylvania  
Association of  
Rural and  
Small  
Schools

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*"Quality education for all children of Pennsylvania"*

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## GOOD SCHOOLS PENNSYLVANIA

In 1995, when PARSS filed suit in the state's highest courts for school funding equity it catalyzed a long needed movement for educational justice. Although the 1996 ruling was a stunning blow to poor school districts, the work to improve conditions in poor schools continued with gusto. In 2001, Good Schools Pennsylvania was formed to augment the many years of work of PARSS and sister organizations. Good Schools Pennsylvania was specifically designed to mobilize parents and persons of faith to become advocates for comprehensive reform of the state's approach to school funding and accountability. In the last year, citizens across the state began 150 local

chapters of Good Schools Pennsylvania, with another 100 chapters expected to commence work in September. Concerned parents, grandpar-

ents, young people and others join the Chapters to learn more about the issues affecting public education; and to work together to build a statewide consensus for the funding, school services and accountability changes necessary for every child to have a quality public education.

Good Schools Pennsylvania's local leadership includes many superintendents from rural, suburban and urban schools. James Scanlon, Superintendent of the Quakertown School District, is one of several superintendents to sponsor a community forum on the need for a new state policy with respect to school funding. Close to 100 local residents

responded to Superintendent Scanlon's invitation to a school funding forum. Good Schools Pennsylvania organized the speakers for the forum, gave each attendee a detailed packet of materials and offered local residents a concrete way to remain involved in statewide advocacy efforts aimed at changing the school funding formula. Other superintendents may want to consider asking Good Schools Pennsylvania to help with similar forums. These community meetings are a terrific way of helping school parents and other concerned local residents understand the local impact of the declining share of state funding for schools and a great way to chan-

nel their energy toward improving the statewide funding system. While parents and other adults can be effective advocates, the impressive voices of students advocating for fairness in

school funding is hard to ignore. In fact, when the members of the House Select Committee on School Funding traveled to Greene County for one of their hearings, the testimony of the students was the most memorable in the minds of most of the Committee members. Good Schools Pennsylvania hopes to bring hundreds of students to Harrisburg on October 22<sup>nd</sup> for a March for Educational Justice (1:00 - 3:30 pm). PARSS members are invited to send delegations of students from rural schools to join this March. To support student engagement in the March and the efforts to improve school funding, Good Schools Penn-

sylvania offers districts a curriculum to be used in either English, History or Current Events classes at the high school level. They also offer a tool kit for forming a Good Schools Pennsylvania High School Action Committee. Schools may find that Senior Project requirements can be fulfilled by helping students form an Action Committee.

Bradford County made a strong showing in the statewide Jonathan Kozol Essay Contest sponsored by Good Schools Pennsylvania. Athens Area School District's tenth grade student Elaine Hughes did a terrific job dramatizing the impact of the disparity in state funding to rural districts. A copy of Elaine's and the other winning essays can be read on the Good Schools Pennsylvania website - [www.goodschoolspa.org](http://www.goodschoolspa.org) - look in the *Press Room Section*. The deadline for the 2002 contest is December 31, 2002. The contest is open to all high school students (grades 9-12). Essays of no more than 2,000 words must be published in a school or local newspaper to qualify for entry. To download materials for this year's contest, go to the Student Section of the website.

Good School Pennsylvania built a base of support on 22 college campuses across Pennsylvania in the last year. In April 2002, students from these Chapters, including Penn State, Millersville, Mercyhurst, Lehigh and several campuses in Southeastern Pennsylvania, delivered petitions with 5,000 signatures calling for school funding adequacy for all poor districts to the Governor and the Gubernatorial candidates. Good Schools Pennsylvania seeks to form an addition 25 Campus Chapters. PARSS members with contacts on college campuses may want to help Good Schools Pennsylvania's Campus Organizers by ar-



(continued on page 3)

# So, what is the agenda going to be?

Each time a governor is elected and another secretary of education appears on the scene we get a new agenda. And, without fail we react to whatever decisions they make or direction they set. I have watched this slow and painful process for the last 30 years. The time has come to break this trend.

My grandfather was a tough Armstrong County farmer. He was the epitome of poor and rural. 'Pop' would have had it no other way. He was strong willed, opinionated and just plain tough. He did have several weaknesses. In spite of his Presbyterian roots, he loved Southern Comfort and he really liked cooked frog. As a young boy he taught me the hallowed art of boiling a frog.

Being one for hands on learning he told me to stoke the fire, boil a pot of water and at just the right moment insert the frogs. I was naïve in my irresponsible youth and did as he said. Besides I thought he could walk on water. As the steam rose and the water boiled I dunked the frogs. When those critters hit the heat, I had frogs everywhere. They were on the stove, in the sink and on my grandmother's lap. I had been misled. You see 'Pop' also had a sense of humor.

'Pop', after a good laugh and getting 'Gram' calmed down, suggested that I try another technique. We started by putting the frogs in a pot of cold water. The frogs, loved it. As they paddled around and confidently did a little backstroke, 'Pop' slowly turned up the heat. The outcome for those content frogs was inevitable. They were cooked without realizing what had happen.

At times we, superintendents, act like those frogs. We are content with and protective of a comfortable environment and all the while someone else is turning up the heat. If we do not get out of the pot and help set the agenda for education in Pennsylvania, the business we love is going to end up just like 'Pop's' frogs.

So, who is setting our agenda? This spring I had the rare opportunity to spend a day with Arnie Hillman. Being with Arnie was an education in and of itself. He invited me to a legislative hearing in Philadelphia. The topic was school funding and he was there on behalf of PARSS. What struck me as I listened to testimony by a variety of people was the vast number of vested interests that impact the legislators. Arnie was the only one saying anything about children and what actually goes on in schools. I began to wonder who was really setting our agenda? After all this was a hearing on funding and ostensibly what was best for children.

Education is at a point of critical mass. We have serious problems that must be addressed by people of strong will and great courage. This is a time of difficult decisions, either we act together by creating a corporate unified voice or we may boil, just like those frogs. The issues we face are acute.

Let's take accountability as an example. During the hearing in Philadelphia a side comment indicated the existence of a legislative committee designed to address school accountability. One has to wonder why we are not proposing our own system of accountability. Why are we not setting this agenda? After all we are spending millions of dollars and impacting the lives of untold children. If history is any indicator whatever the legislature creates will be inappropriate, we will react to it, waste time and the children will lose.

Near and dear to the heart of PARSS is funding. If the debacle this spring did not prove the need for funding reform nothing ever will. But achieving equity only leads to the real discussion – adequacy. When you pause to think about adequacy it does not take long to realize that Pennsylvania has four school systems. We are a mix of cities, affluent, average and truly small rural and poor districts. Each faces unique problems providing adequate educational programs for the children. The issues Larry Palmer wrestles with in Forbes Road are vastly different from mine in Greencastle-Antrim. Simplistically, I would guess he needs lots of money. I need the freedom to be entrepreneurial.

Vocational education is another fascinating issue. I understand that we have eighty plus career centers or vocational technical

schools in the state. Most of these schools are a product of the sixties and seventies. The structures and in some cases programs are at their life expectancy. Many are not thriving. Are we going to renovate and build more schools or are we going to look at vocational education through a different set of glasses? Of course when you change glasses it does not take long to see the possibilities of virtual education. Children no longer need a school building to be educated.

On line learning is a reality. The only downside is that we, as a group, did not think of it first. A large part of what we are upset about is money. Even after the recent reform, the system is an unreasonable drain on our resources. Perhaps what we should be discussing is quality control. Whatever our beliefs virtual education is here to stay and we should use it rather than complain about it.

The lists of issues we face are mind-boggling. What are we going to do about schools as sanctuaries? Think of the millions of dollars we have spent making safe schools safer. Then there are conundrums like technology, standards, consortiums, certification, legitimate competition and workforce development.

Personally, I must get past my distaste for politics. Corporately we must become a voice for children. We must stop competing and come together to help set the agenda. From what I have experienced PARSS is the forum for this task. After all, who else has Arnie, Woody and Joe?

Unfortunately, superintendents are not always trusted by the legislature. This reality is in part our fault; indeed it is my fault. I have not been willing to accept responsibility for the performance of the children under my charge. I have been too quick to make excuses, to be a victim. I must change; we must change. No longer can we afford to react and whine about what someone else is doing to us. Regaining respect is a case of first trusting others and then delivering on what we say we are going to accomplish.

We have to make a choice. Either we are going to get in the game and play to win or we are going to sit idly by as someone else sets the rules. A decision to play takes great courage because there is risk. But, if we are leaders then it is time to lead. If we do not, I fear that our destiny is determined. We are going to end up like 'Pop's' frogs. And, if we get cooked it is the children who will lose and that is unacceptable.

*P Duff Rearick  
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## Pennsylvania Rural and Small School News

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## 2002-03 EDUCATION ISSUES

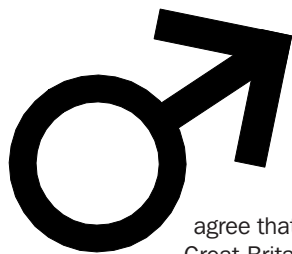
**W**ith the new school year just underway, it may be helpful for us to forecast some of the education and education-related political issues we may be dealing with this year. No surprises on this list, but with a general election looming that has tremendous implications for public education in Pennsylvania, anyone of these could become that very large and obnoxious party guest that determines whether or not anyone else has a good time. These are presented in the order of priority that we at PARSS might like to see established, but know that such is beyond our control.

- School funding reform/tax reform. This is a slam dunk. We have waited for it to ascend the list for many years. Now that we are in position for it to assume first place, we are beginning to hear the wheel of fortune turning: "Where it stops, nobody knows".
- Reimbursement for school construction.
- Assessment, particularly as related to the implementation of "No Child Left Behind".
- Vouchers, with thanks to the Supremes.
- Teacher testing (a loser that could disappear in a hurry).
- Charter schools, particularly their lack of credible performance.
- Philadelphia. Those kids should go to school with laces painted on their backs, because they are sure being used as political footballs.

## MALES GOING TO COLLEGE

Without making much fanfare in the media, a problem has cropped up in American education that appears to be very serious. Applications and entrants to four year colleges are now predominantly female. In prior years, we all worked hard to get young women to see college as a possibility. Now that same problem has arisen with young men. Statistics range from 45% males to 55% females to some schools with 35% males and 65% female attendees.

There have been numerous suggestions about why such a thing has occurred. Some may attribute it to our economy, where there may have been jobs for young men straight out of high school who had particular skills in the technology field. These school to work students came under the umbrella of many federal programs that were instituted in the 80's and 90's. In most cases male students appeared to be a larger share of these programs than females.



There are also some views that blame particular philosophies then extant that discriminated against young males. Some of these views are expressed in recently published materials and books. Whatever the reason, college admissions officers

agree that it is a serious problem that needs national attention as it has in Great Britain, where this problem has also arisen.

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ranging for an invitation to the campus so they can brief students on the need for their engagement and help them form an active Good Schools Pennsylvania Campus Chapter.

Each month this fall, Good Schools Pennsylvania will bring prominent clergy and lay leaders from across the state for an inter-faith prayer vigil for educational justice to the Capital Rotunda. The monthly vigils garner increasing attention from the legislature due to the fact that the number of vigil participants grows monthly with an impressive showing of over 300 residents from across the state attending the vigil before the end of the legislative session. The next vigil, September 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm, will announce the release of a Pastoral Letter for Educational Justice issued by the all the Pennsylvania Lutheran Bishops. This letter will subsequently be read from most Lutheran pulpits so that all parishioners become involved in fighting for improved state funding of public schools.

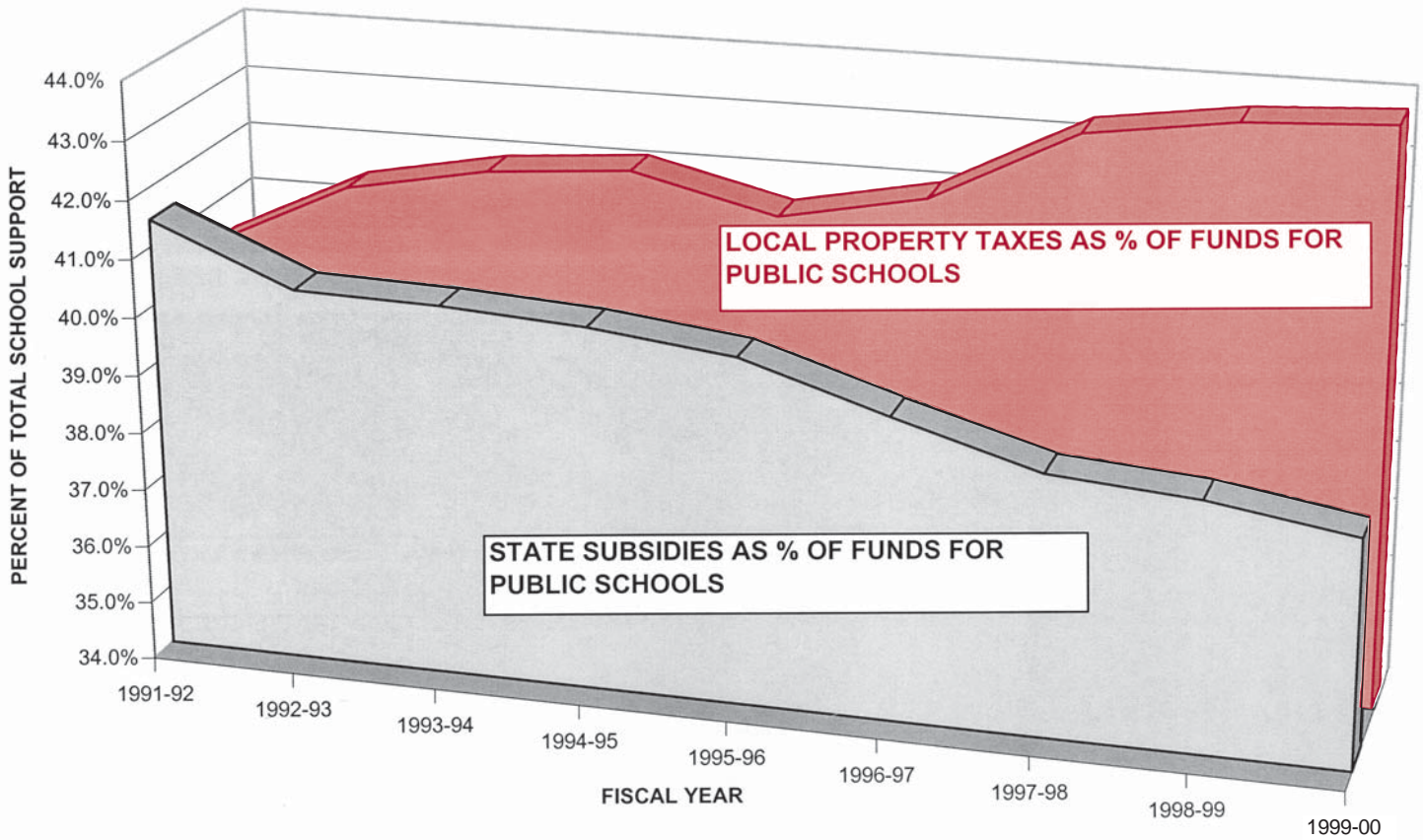
Finally, as the election season draws near, Good Schools Pennsylvania is working with local leaders to hold candidate forums to discuss public education. Superintendents who wish to be involved in helping boost the attendance at these important local discussions among candidates can contact Good Schools Pennsylvania. To locate the Field Office closest to you either look on the website or call 1-888-543-GSPA (4772).

### PARSS Board of Directors: 2002-03 Meeting Schedule

The PARSS Board will meet at the following dates times and locations. Superintendents, or assistant superintendents from any member district are welcome, and encouraged, to attend any of these meetings as guests of the board. Just call or email Joe Bard in advance of your visit.

September 27, 9:00a.m.- Board Retreat, State College Ramada Inn  
December 13, 9:00a.m.- Mt. Nittany Inn (between Centre Hall and Pleasant Gap)  
February 7, 9:00a.m.- Mt. Nittany Inn  
April 23, 6:p.m.- State College Ramada Inn  
June 20, 9:00a.m.- Harrisburg (location to be announced)

# SHIFTING THE LOAD in the 90's: \$2.31 BILLION FROM STATE TO LOCAL PROPERTY TAXPAYERS



## PUBLIC EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA: A BROKEN PROMISE GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STATE SPENDING

