



# PARSS

Pennsylvania  
Association of  
Rural and  
Small  
Schools

FEBRUARY 2003

*"Quality education for all children of Pennsylvania"*

VOL. 16 NO. 6

## NREA Positions on Federal Education and Policy Issues

PARSS Executive Director Joe Bard serves on the National Rural Education Association's Legislative Committee. This group met in Washington for three days in mid-January for the purpose of putting together NREA positions on the education related issues scheduled to be taken up by Congress in this session.

Given the much larger role in education the federal government seems intent on taking (whether appropriate or not), the PARSS board of directors as decided that more of the attention and resources of the organization need to be directed towards representing the member districts in the national arena, as well as in Harrisburg.

Here are the NREA positions on all of the authorizing issues the committee felt it was necessary to address. One of the items (the Rural Education Achievement Program) has been zeroed out of the President's budget for next year, and efforts will be made to restore it. Only a handful of Pennsylvania districts qualified for these funds last year, so not much is known about it in our state.

### AUTHORIZING ISSUES

#### 1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is slated to be reauthorized this congressional session. The members of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) believe the federal role in education should continue to provide the guidance to promote equal educational opportunities for students, promulgate leadership activities, and encourage the development and the dissemination of educational research and statistics.

The highest priority for NREA during IDEA reauthorization is mandatory funding of IDEA to achieve the federally promised 40% of excess special education costs.

#### A. Discipline

- NREA supports streamlining the current discipline provisions to allow more flexibility at the local level.

- In addition, NREA supports the presumption that all students operate within the same set of rules and support the creation of exceptions where appropriate.

- NREA supports an increase in resources for alternative accommodations for students targeted at rural school districts.

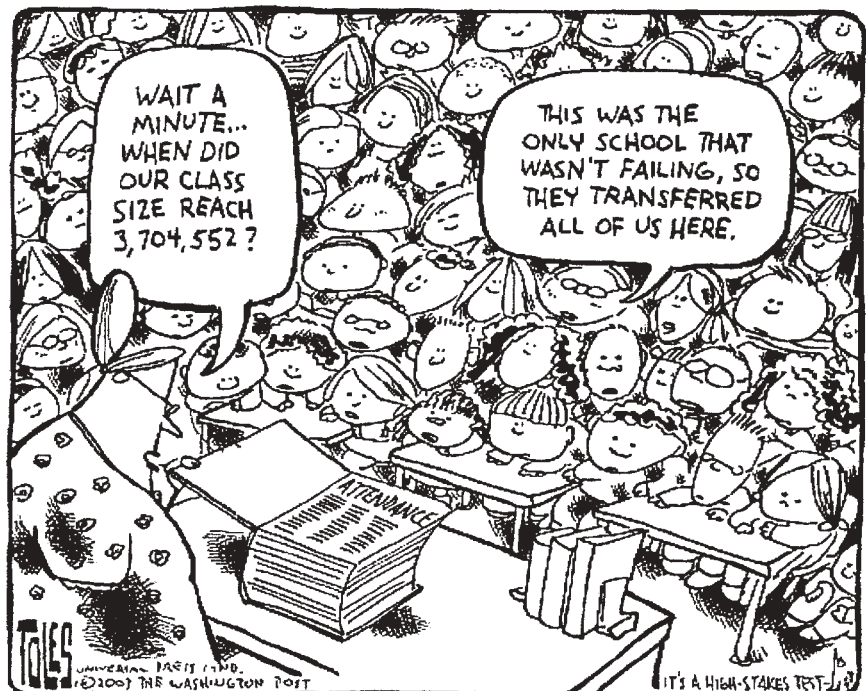
#### B. Due Process

- Prior to entering a due process procedure the parents must notify the LEA in writing of the specific complaints.

- The members of NREA support requiring mediation as the second step in dispute resolution.

- NREA supports streamlining the dispute resolution process by requiring that after a due process hearing on an issue either the judgment is accepted or the process proceeds to the next step on the issue in dispute. This would prevent multiple hearings on the same matter if the party does not approve of the first judgment.

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- NREA supports a reasonable statute of limitations on presentment of complaints.

- Attorney's fees can have a large impact on a rural district budget; therefore NREA supports limiting attorney's fees based on case law.

### C. Related Services

- NREA supports reimbursement to schools for Medicaid eligible services for Medicaid eligible students.

- NREA supports requiring the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Solutions (CMS) to comply with section 1903 (C) of Title XIX.

- NREA opposes the CMS proposal to require school district to bill third parties to qualify for reimbursement.

### D. IEP

- NREA opposes mandatory inclusion of the student in IEP meetings.

### E. Definitions and Categories

- NREA supports the clarification of current categories and definitions and where possible streamlining of these categories.

- The members of NREA support the tightening of eligibility requirements.

### F. Personnel and Staffing

- For educational and related ser-

vices, NREA supports state certification to prevail.

- NREA believes that the federal government should recognize the unique needs of rural schools in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers and paraprofessionals. Support should include additional flexibility, time and resources.

### G. Early Intervention

- NREA supports permitting use of IDEA funds for early intervention using all available supports before referral and evaluation and creation of exceptions, where necessary.

### H. Allocation of Funding

- NREA supports a requirement that a portion of the state share of IDEA dollars be used to assist LEAs with exceptionally high cost students.

- NREA also supports the reduction of local maintenance of effort by the corresponding increase in federal government as IDEA moves to full funding. Because of the federal shortfall for the last 26 years, this would be recapturing of local funds that have been overextended.

### 2. Perkins Vocational Education Act

- NREA supports the continuation of the Perkins Act with increased funding for rural schools.

- NREA urge that a separate Title be added to the act that is specifically for LEAs because post secondary institutions do not serve all rural areas adequately.

### 3. Higher Education Act

- NREA urges that funds be earmarked to assist rural school districts and individual teachers to meet the requirements of NCLB regarding highly qualified teachers.

- NREA supports federal loan forgiveness for teachers who serve in rural and/ or low-income schools.

### 4. Vouchers

NREA opposes vouchers by any name: public funds shall be used for public schools.

### 5. E-Rate

NREA supports the E-Rate program in its current form under the FCC and encourages the continuation of the rural provisions.

### 6. Early Childhood

The members of NREA support the continuation of early childhood programs, including Head Start and Part C of IDEA.

### 7. School Construction

NREA supports the extension of the Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZABs) with the current rural provisions. There should be continued enforcement of bond opportunity for rural districts.

### 8. Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP)

NREA supports full funding of the Rural Education Achievement Program at a level of \$300 million. Each sub-program should be funded at \$150 million each.

### 9. Payments In Lieu of Taxes

NREA supports in lieu of property tax programs, such as Forest County payments and Impact Aid. NREA supports the distribution of these funds back to the district that would have received the property taxes in an equitable formula.

### 10. Technical Assistance

NREA supports continuation of funding for programs that would increase the ability to deliver technical assistance to rural districts.

## REGULATORY ISSUES

### 1. Rural Research Center

NREA supports the creation of a National Center on Rural Education Research within the Institute of Educational Sciences.

### 2. No Child Left Behind

- NREA urges the Secretary of Education to provide the maximum flexibility possible in assisting predominantly rural states and school districts in meeting the unique challenges presented to them by NCLB.

- NREA urges the President, in his FY 2004 budget request and forward, to request the full funding authorized under NCLP for all programs, including the Rural Education Achievement Program.

- With the understanding that provisions of NCLB are predominately flawed, NREA supports the suspension of the enforcement of this Act if there are not necessary modifications and funding to assist rural districts in complying with NCLB.

## Pennsylvania Rural and Small School News

is published by the Pennsylvania  
Association of Rural  
and Small Schools (PARSS)  
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Printed by TransAmerica Printing

## PARSS = Growth and Change

The title of this piece may not be much as an equation, but it is certainly the credo of this organization. Several years ago when the Supreme Court administered the coup de gras to the nearly 10 year old equity suit, there were quite a few who felt it would have the same effect on PARSS.

For a number of reasons that was obviously a premature judgment. PARSS is stronger than it has ever been. 180 of Pennsylvania's school districts and intermediate units are members of PARSS, and that number has increased each year since the end of the equity suit. Our members are supportive, loyal and involved in a way that I think you will not find in any other major education organization in the state.

A little realized fact is that not all our members are rural. Because PARSS stands for something and fights for it, a number of non rural districts are drawn to us, and understand that if we succeed, so do they. Rural and small schools will always be our focus, but the unity of purpose and ability to take stands on big issues makes us a home for those districts that share our principles and want to be heard.

A primary reason for our strength is that the end of the court case was the beginning of new life for the issue of school funding reform. This is attested to by the fact that we have just seen a gubernatorial campaign where it figured as the major issue, and a special session of the General Assembly was held on property tax reform, which has everything to do with school funding.

Secondly, while money is part of almost every issue that has an effect on the quality of education opportunities, there are so many others related to that central point that PARSS has spread out to include them in our advocacy positions and programs of service to districts. Helping districts help themselves is a very positive path to take. Most of you gave

up waiting for Prince Charming a long time ago and would, if given a choice, rather do it yourselves.

Another reason is the vitality and commitment of rural educators. This is reflected in the energy of PARSS, making it rural education's major voice in this state. It is always invigorating to take one of the swings around the state that Woody and I go on periodically. We always learn new things, and are amazed at the amount of imagination and diversity we encounter.

Lastly, part of the reason for the growth of PARSS is our large scale, daily use of the internet. Our board made a commitment to the website and email as our primary communication almost five years ago. It has moved us from one age to another, and has allowed us to create a community where previously there were outposts.

We put a significant percentage of our annual budget into maintaining and improving those lines of communication. There are quarterly newsletters now rather than the seven we published previously, but the website is a continuously running, always changing newsletter. We conduct most of PARSS' business interactively, with our board, and with the whole membership. Our ability to quickly find out what you think on issues, form policy positions and make decisions is unmatched by any other education organization in Pennsylvania. This makes us the Harrisburg equivalent of Jeb Stuart's cavalry, although we plan to be on the winning side.

Excuse my taking all this space to blow our horn, but I'm proud of you and proud of what PARSS has become. That is OK as long as we know we have to stay open to more change if we wish to keep growing. So let's replace the congratulatory hand shake with a kick in the pants just to keep everybody moving.

*Joe Bard*

## Announcing the 2003 PARSS Annual Meeting Program

If you don't know that the PARSS Annual Meeting will be held on April 24-25 at the State College Ramada, you haven't been listening. Don't forget our terrific golf tournament at Toftrees on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The 2003 edition of the PARSS Annual Meeting will have Dr. Vicki Phillips, Secretary of Education Designate, as its keynote speaker. Dr. Phillips will talk about the administration education priorities, her plans for the Department of Education and the impact of the new ESEA on rural schools and students.

Donna Cooper, Director of the Governor's Policy Office and one of Governor Rendell's closest advisers, will speak to the participants about the school funding reform plans in next years budget, as well as the issue of accountability.

School district referenda are a very hot topic. We have asked two people who are very involved in those discussions in

Harrisburg to speak to the pros and cons of them. Tom Gentzel, Executive Director of PSBA will speak against referenda, while Drew Crompton, Counsel to Senator Jubelirer, will speak for them.

Instructional technology is an area that continues to grow in importance to rural schools. Jay Scott, Superintendent of Spring Cove School District in Blair County is one of the most successful implementers of IT programs and training in Pennsylvania. In July he will become the Executive Director of Tuscarora IU, which itself has been a leader in distance learning. Jay will lead a session on this critical topic.

We believe in sticking with what works. For a number of years we have had the honor of having the Executive Directors of the House and Senate Education Committees, both majority and minority, come to the Annual Meeting and give us a legislative update. All four have

accepted our invitation for 2003.

In the same vein, Terry Madonna, Pennsylvania's pre-eminent pollster and political analyst, will join us for the fifth straight year. Terry's insights are taken seriously and the PARSS board relies on his work as they discuss policies positions for the organization.

The banquet speaker this year promises to be a treat. Dr. Mike Curry, Vice President of West Virginia's Concord College, has some interesting things to say about rural life that are drawn from both his personal and professional life.

Add to this an outstanding group of exhibitors who are eager to spend some time with you, the usual convivial atmosphere and informal networking that the PARSS Annual Meeting is known for, and we hope you will put it on your calendar and download the registration form from [www.parss.org](http://www.parss.org).

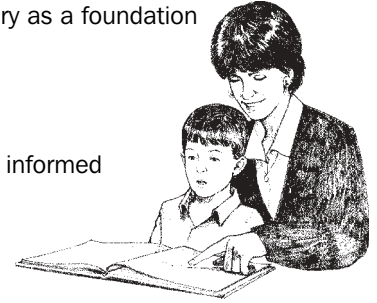
# Summary of Proposed Prekindergarten Initiative

PARSS participated in creating, with the leadership of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), and the board has endorsed, the following principles that pertain to preschool children and preschool programs. While we are still working to achieve the goal of full-day kindergarten, we must give attention and priority to the need for preparation for successful pursuit of a quality education.

Goal: By the year 2011, every Pennsylvania child will begin school having learned what is necessary as a foundation for a successful K-12 experience.”

## Principles:

1. Parents are the first and most important teachers of children and should be enabled to make informed choices among voluntary high-quality services for their children in the early years.
2. To ensure that children are school ready, they should have:
  - a. access to voluntary high-quality pre-K education,
  - b. parents who understand child development, and
  - c. access to health and other social services.
3. **Children three through five years of age should receive pre-K services in a diverse array of settings.**
4. **The needs of families with parents employed outside the home or attending school should be considered in developing pre-K services.**
5. To ensure that children are school ready, highly competent professionals should deliver all pre-K services.
6. To ensure the success of the initiative, an interagency coordinating body should provide oversight with leadership from the Governor’s office. Children and families will benefit most from a Pennsylvania pre-K initiative that is housed in the Department of Education under the auspices of a newly established Bureau of Prekindergarten Education that reports to the Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.
7. At the local level, the pre-K initiative should be the governance responsibility of the local school district and should be operated through a model of local or regional planning and coordination.
8. Financing pre-K services should become primarily a state responsibility, beginning in high-need communities and becoming universal by 2011.



## Free NCLB Online Course Released by The Pennsylvania Department of Education

A new Act 48 free online course, “Essential Building Blocks of K-3 Reading Instruction—An Introduction” is now available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education-funded professional education website <http://PA.ProfessionalEducation.org>.

The 15-hour course is designed to assist Pennsylvania school districts implement the federal No Child Left Behind - Reading First initiative. Currently 165 hours of free Act 48 online professional education programs are available to eligible educators through the Online Professional Education Network (OPEN) including subjects such as data-driven decision making, English language learners, Mathematics, Science, Technology and more.

The new course focuses on the essential building blocks of a comprehensive early literacy program. Scientifically based reading research shows that 95% of children entering our kindergarten classrooms can learn to read – on time and on grade level – given appropriate, scientifically based instruction during kindergarten, first, and second grade. This introductory course will show how to achieve these results by focusing efforts on instructional practices based on solid scientific research. The course content team was lead by Helen Conahan-Dettrey, Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, and Dr. Corinne Eisenhart, Early Childhood Education Advisor for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The course includes contributions by Dr. Reid Lyon, chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch within the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

This new course is available free to all eligible Pennsylvania educators through OPEN. This newly released course joins a variety of other standards-based online courses, which can be accessed from school or the comfort of home while assuring fast, high performance over the Internet.

**The multimedia courses follow a practitioner-driven model ending with guided practice activities requiring the application of knowledge and skills in the learning environment. Libraries of links offer supplemental reading and research, and the online lesson plans and discussion groups provide opportunities to share information with fellow educators. Fifteen Act 48 professional education hours are awarded for each of the courses, with the hours automatically recorded and reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for each user.**

All online courses are developed concertedly by Learning Sciences International, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units. This partnership includes representation from practicing teachers, administrators, higher education, intermediate units, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, content experts, and instructional design and multimedia professionals.

For more information on “Essential Building Blocks of K-3 Reading Instruction—An Introduction” and other free online courses or to register for a course, visit the website: <http://PA.ProfessionalEducation.org>.