



Talking Points on Current Issues

The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (PAESSP) recommends and supports the following:

1) Increase Public School Funding Using a Fair Formula

"It seems a little off that where you live can determine the type of education you receive. But that's the way things are in Pennsylvania right now." ~*Pittsburgh Tribune Review*

All students must have access to a quality education no matter where they live. To make that happen, we need to fundamentally change how public schools are funded. The current system is not fair to students or taxpayers. PAESSP has been an important member of a broad campaign involving 50 organizations from across Pennsylvania to encourage legislators to create a fair formula for funding public education. We joined the Fair Funding Campaign and support its recommendations for a new school funding formula.

2) Address Pennsylvania's Pension Crisis

Pennsylvanians are being buried in an avalanche of debt that threatens to swallow up the state's economy. All 500 school districts in Pennsylvania are struggling with this pension crisis. Given the increasing liabilities, Pennsylvania must deal realistically with PSERS' insolvency. We have kicked the can down the road for too long. Aggressive action must be taken to address this serious issue while not compromising the benefits of current and retired employees. PAESSP continues to support a defined benefit plan while also correcting the debt not caused by school employees.

3) Revise Act 82 – Educator Effectiveness Law

Pennsylvania developed a new state-approved Teacher and Principal Effectiveness System under Act 82. This system is comprised of discrete evaluation models for classroom teachers, non-teaching professionals (including educational specialists) and principals. After two years of implementing these new evaluation models, educators have learned several lessons about effective evaluation and have grown to appreciate positive aspects of the new system. There are many positive outcomes to both the teacher and principal evaluation systems, but there also have been many unintended negative consequences. Educators also are raising questions and issues related to validity, reliability, effectiveness and practicality of the new system. And, the new evaluation system makes teacher dismissal more difficult than the previous evaluation tool.

PAESSP believes strongly that the ratings for the Danielson framework and the Framework for Leadership should be judged on their own merits and not be influenced by SPP, teaching specific data and/or elective data. All of these components should be used as signaling devices to have critical conversations about curriculum, instruction and teaching practices. PAESSP in conjunction with PASA has produced a white paper on this topic, which will be published in the May issue of our journal called *PA Administrator*.

4) Keystones and Project Based Assessments

It is understood and accepted by educators that accountability is an important factor in measuring student growth. Educators do not fear accountability but rather want it to be used in ways that promote organizational growth, refined teaching practices, and student learning opportunities. Replacing the 11th-grade PSSA with the Keystone Exams was a step in the right direction. Having the Keystones follow the end of course completion rather than testing in the 11th-grade on content students may have had 3 years prior was a welcome relief. However, linking the passing of the Keystones to a graduation requirement has caused many unintended consequences for students and school districts. With cuts already made in personnel and teachers having full loads, districts are struggling to find staff to teach the mandated remediation prior to a student retesting. In addition, students are being pulled from electives and other courses in order to schedule the remediation courses. Added to this fact is the confusion surrounding the Project Based Assessments. No clear process has been articulated for the PBAs and districts fear that both the scoring and reporting of PBAs back to districts will not be timely especially for students nearing the end of their high school career. Thus, PAESSP continues to support the use of the Keystone Exams, but supports the elimination of the graduation requirement component. It should be a local decision on how to use the Keystones in conjunction with the course.

If you would like more information about these talking points, please feel free to contact Dr. Paul M. Healey, PAESSP Executive Director, at healey@paessp.org or Dr. Joseph H. Clapper, PAESSP Assistant Executive Director, at clapper@paessp.org or by calling the office 717-732-4999.