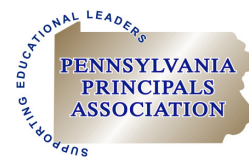


Executive Director's Notepad . . .

This fall, more than the leaves are changing



**By Dr. Eric C. Eshbach,
PA Principals
Association
Executive
Director**

The onset of autumn is marked by change. The change in temperature, the vibrant changes in leaf color and the changes associated with a new school year are all indicative of the fact that nothing in life stays the same. Early indications from conversations I've had with principals around the state tell me that this fall has been a much more tranquil start to the school year for most of you. Last year at this time, we were struggling through the challenges of mask mandates, learning loss and uncertainty from the ongoing pandemic. While those have certainly been replaced by other challenges, my hope is that the fall of 2022 has been more productive and more peaceful than the fall of 2021.

In our democracy, autumn also ushers in a significant change in our government. For the first time in many years in Pennsylvania, we had the opportunity to select a new governor and a new U.S. Senator. With the election results becoming official, it is perceivable that significant changes lie ahead with both Governor-elect, Josh Shapiro, and U.S. Senator-elect, John Fetterman. Maybe even more significant is the impact the November 8th election may have on the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. As I write this article, there are still three State House Districts that have yet to be called but which could transfer the balance of power in the Pennsylvania State House to the Democrats.

When Josh Shapiro takes office in January, it will be the first time in decades that a new governor will take office who is from the same political party as his predecessor. We should not be lulled into thinking that this will equate "status quo," especially as it relates to public education in the commonwealth. While the new governor is from the same political party as the incumbent, it is expected that he will be quite different in how he organizes his cabinet, the manner in which he prioritizes policy and the way in which he governs. Currently, all of this remains an unknown.

Equally unknown and significant are the changes in the legislature in Harrisburg, especially in the House of Representatives. We will most definitely see changes in leadership of the House Education Committee, as the Majority Chair, Curtis Sonney, and the Minority Chair, Mark Longietti, did not seek reelection. Which party will have leadership in all committees is yet to be decided. Changes in committee leadership, changes in leadership at the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the potential for each party controlling one of the houses of the legislature will certainly play a role in which legislative issues gain momentum in the upcoming session.

No matter the outcome of the election, the individuals appointed to leadership roles, or the committee structure in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's principals need to take this opportunity to become known and to be heard. During this time of change, it is important that our elected officials understand the needs and challenges you face. I encourage you to consider whether the elected officials who represent you in Harrisburg and in Washington:

1. Understand the challenges your school faces?
2. Understand the impact the inequity of school funding has on your school and your students?
3. Show an interest in ensuring all students succeed and help to build a strong, vibrant economy and citizenry?
4. Are more interested in special interest groups and accepting money from groups that take money away from public education?
5. Realize the impact the past several years have had on the number of candidates you have for a teaching position, the number of substitute teachers on which you can depend on any given day and the mental health issues our staff and students face?



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6. Make attempts to understand the challenges we face by visiting our schools and talking with our staff and students?
7. Believe all students have the right to a high-quality, fully funded education and have defined how s/he will advocate and vote to ensure that happens?

If you have answered “no” to even one of these questions, it behooves the community and the students you have been called to serve to make every effort to change the “no” into a “yes.” Take time to call your state senators and representatives. Invite them to your building. Ask them to read to your students. Encourage them to hold a question-and-answer session with a class of students, a group

of parents, your Act 93 team or even your school board. Call them, email them or text them when a crucial vote is being considered that impacts you, your school or your community. *They need to hear from you!*

The natural change that occurs in our democracy surrounding elections makes our nation unique and makes our citizens critically important. While 2022 may have been considered an “off-year election,” it was anything but that for Pennsylvania. The results demonstrate that now, perhaps even more so than in the past, we need to be sure that we are helping to write the narrative for what lies ahead in educational policy and practice. *Let us remember how vitally important our advocacy and our voices are to the children and communities we serve.*

Dr. Diane Kirk Honored with the 2022 Educational Excellence Award

Diane L. Kirk, Ph.D., recently retired Clinical Associate Professor in the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Education, and the Director of the Tri-State Area School Study Council, is the recipient of the **PA Principals Association’s 2022 Educational Excellence Award**. The association’s most prestigious award is given to a person who has been a “friend of public education” and who has made significant contributions to the attainment of educational excellence in the commonwealth’s elementary and secondary schools. Dr. Kirk was presented with this award at the PA Principals Association’s LEAD22 Conference on Sunday, Oct. 16, 2022, during the Awards Dinner.

In addition, Dr. Kirk was surprised with a retirement celebration, surrounded by 100 colleagues, her family and friends, held on Wednesday, August 17, 2022, at the Edgewood Country Club in Churchill, Pennsylvania. Dr. Eric Eshbach, PA Principals Association Executive Director, presented her with a beautiful planter, and along with Dr. Carol Sprinker, PA Principals Association board member, revealed that she was selected to receive the 2022 Educational Excellence Award. Dr. Eshbach said, “Dr. Kirk’s commitment to Pennsylvania educational leaders and to public education made her the perfect choice to receive the PA Principals Association’s most prestigious award. She is well known across the commonwealth for her work as a leader, teacher and a mentor.”

In her esteemed 50-year career in education, Dr. Kirk has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent of schools (Peters Township School District from 1997-2006). For the last 17 years, she served as an associate professor of education at the University of Pittsburgh where she managed the superintendent, principal and curriculum and instruction internship courses in the Department of Administrative and Policy Studies that all students must complete in order to gain certification in Pennsylvania. As the Director of the Tri-State School Study Council, Dr. Kirk manages Tri-State’s activities, including research and development assistance for member school districts, conferences and professional development opportunities.

Dr. Sprinker, who nominated Dr. Kirk for this award, said, “Dr. Kirk is a fierce advocate of public education and strong supporter of educational leaders across the commonwealth. She values relationships, models professionalism and encourages career development for principals and superintendents. She’s a teacher, mentor, counselor and friend who will be greatly missed at the University of Pittsburgh.”

Dr. Kirk holds a bachelor’s degree in education from Youngstown University; a Master of Science in education and her elementary principal certificate

from Duquesne University; and a Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Pittsburgh.

“I am so honored to be recognized for doing what I love doing so much and for working with these people who are trying to manage these very challenging jobs. We need strong, resilient leaders who are compassionate about children in principal roles. I’ve worked with so many students across the commonwealth, and mainly in western Pennsylvania, who are now in principal roles, and it is very gratifying,” shared Dr. Kirk.

Dr. Kirk resides in Pleasant Hills, Pennsylvania (South Hills of Pittsburgh). She has one son, John E. Kirk IV.



PA Principals Association Executive Director, Dr. Eric C. Eshbach, presented the 2022 Educational Excellence Award to Diane L. Kirk, Ph.D., at the annual Awards Dinner on Oct. 16 held during the LEAD22 Conference at Kalahari Resorts Poconos.