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Symposium Registration Ready to Go!

After some technical difficulties with our website, we have switched gears and registration for the April 16th Symposium is now available through the following link:

We have a varied and interesting program arranged for you this year, in a beautiful, new, central location in Bedford Springs. Get all the latest information on fund development and social media while catching up with your PR colleagues from around the state.

We are a family in school PR, unlike many jobs where your colleagues are your competitors. Don't miss out on this chance to see old friends and make new ones in the PenSPRA family. Invest the time in your professional development to rejuvenate yourself with new ideas and positive energy.

See you on April 16th!

Last Call for Communications Contest

Entries for PenSPRA's publications contest must be postmarked by this Friday, Feb. 15th.

Recognition of your work by an outside agency can be an important part of proving your value in your district. Take a few minutes and enter something you are proud of today! Details are here.

Snapshot of the Governor's Budget

Governor Corbett released details of the 2013-2014 budget last week. This budget includes an increase of 1.67% to the basic education subsidy. This increase would restore about 5% of the funding that has been reduced in the previous two budgets. Special education funding remained flat. There is an increase for early childhood education, providing additional amounts of \$5 million for early intervention, \$4.5 million for pre-K Counts and \$1.9 million for Head Start, for a total of \$348.4 million, an increase of 3.4 percent.

The increase for the basic ed subsidy, however, has a contingency. Corbett is tying the increase to the passage of pension reform legislation. Without approval of this legislation, Governor Corbett "and his key aides have strongly suggested that if the legislature does not act, they will likely look for cuts in education, setting the stage for a showdown come summer. The budget must be approved by July 1, the start of the new fiscal year." (See Inquirer article, below)

Governor Corbett's budget address also included a second contingency plan for education funding. If the state sells its liquor stores, approximately \$1 billion for "Passport for Learning Block Grants" will be available over four years. The plan calls for grants to be awarded in spring

2014 and \$200 million to be available for school districts in 2014-15. These grants would support four initiatives: school safety; ensuring students are at grade level by third grade; individualized, self-paced learning aimed at mastery; and STEM -- science, technology, engineering and math skills.

Critics of the liquor store sale plan say it does not provide “adequate, equitable, and sustainable” funding for schools. The funds would only be available for four years.

While this budget did not have actual cuts, it does leave schools with a less than reliable funding source. More to come.

Pension Reform... Fibs

I wanted to call your attention to two “fibs” I have noticed in recent media coverage of the pension reform and pension crisis. Call these fibs, or just misleading, but these statements are not helping the public to understand the issue.

The first is comments like this: there has been “a decade of underfunding (to the pension system) by state government and local school districts.” As you know, school districts have no say in the amount of money they must pay into the pension system. The state sets this amount and the district must pay it. Implying that a school district had a choice in how much they invested into the pension system is just not true.

I have also noted media coverage that implies school taxes will increase right along with the required pension system increases; for example, a 10% increase in pension system contributions will result in a 10% school tax increase. This, of course, cannot happen, because Act One restricts school taxes to the yearly index, which is usually around 2%. What is more likely to happen with required pension increases is that school programs will be cut in order to fund the increase.

If we all try and correct such misleading information in our communities, we will advance the dialogue on this important issue.

News From Around the State and Nation

The Details on the Budget

<http://www.mcall.com/news/breaking/mc-corbetts-budget-might-boost-school-funding-20130205,0,3393861.story>

The Basic Education Subsidy is Up

<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/news/education/education-basic-subsidy-up-but-some-say-levels-are-too-low-673596/#ixzz2KbXjvZv8>

More Info on Corbett’s Plan with Pension Reform and School Budgets

<http://mobile.philly.com/news/?wss=/philly/news/homepage/&id=188144401&viewAll=y#more>

How the Increased Budget is Tied to Pension Reform

http://articles.philly.com/2013-02-06/news/36766972_1_corbett-s-budget-budget-plan-public-pensions

A Response to the Proposed Pension Changes

<http://triblive.com/state/pennsylvania/3435827-74/pension-state-employees#ixzz2KLODYNR5>

Graphic on the State Budget Over Several Years

<http://pennbpc.org/infographic-education-funding-2013-14-budget-0>

Good Opinion Piece on the Budget

<http://yinzercation.wordpress.com/2013/02/06/budget-with-a-but/>

More parents and Teachers Around the Country are Opposing Standardized Tests

<http://www.examiner.com/article/chicago-parents-pass-petitions-at-37-schools-against-district-testing-programs>

A different look at American student's performance internationally. Our most advantaged students are world-class readers, and our most disadvantaged students are making more gains than disadvantaged students in any other country.

<http://m.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/01/why-gloomy-pundits-and-politicians-are-wrong-about-americas-education-system/267278/>