

Good Afternoon

A new issue of e-Comm Alert has been posted to the website.

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<http://www.penspra.org/5106552695916/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=51314&5106552695916Nav=|&NodeID=35>

Thanks

Karen Smith, APR

Executive Director, PenSPRA

Symposium Wrap-Up

A great day was had by all in Hershey on March 6th at the Annual PenSPRA Symposium. Many thanks to our coordinators Kim Newell and Jason Davidek for all their hard work to arrange a full day of staff development for school PR staff! Also our appreciation to Pat Roenigk from Penn State, Rick Kaufman of Bloomington Public Schools, eSchoolView and Blackboard Connect. Thanks to the attendees who spend a few minutes helping the board understand how PenSPRA can best meet your needs in the future. Finally, thanks to the board members for their commitment and hard work on behalf of PenSPRA. Copies of the powerpoints from the presentations will be added to the website soon.

The Business of Schools

In case you aren't an NSPRA member and didn't receive the recent issue of NSPRA Counselor, there is an excellent piece by Tom DeLapp which is definitely worth reading. The topic is perfect for budget time; 20 reasons why schools can't be run like a business. I have included my favorites here, and the link is below if you would like to read the entire piece.

No Investment Capital

Capitalism depends on capital. Return on Investment (ROI) means you spend enough money first and then see if it pays off. Investment yields return. In education, our incentive programs are the complete opposite — Investment on Return. We mandate that schools achieve certain rates of improvement and then we promise to give them more money. As a superintendent, the corporate CEO would have to use promised incentives instead of concrete investments to get results. But chronic underfunding of education (NCLB for example) has shifted ROI to IOR which actually means IOU to an educator. "Show me the money!" isn't the quid pro quo in public education that it is in the private sector. In fact, our only incentive is to avoid the sanctions. Corporate leaders throw money at their problems. Educators don't have that option and, in fact, society has been systematically de-investing in its public schools as a percent of personal income or GDP.

Educators Can't Niche Market

Businesses succeed when they find their market niche and focus all of their energies on perfecting their products or services in that market. The education marketplace is demanding, comprehensive, and diverse. The push-me-pull-you between state and federal standard-setters, parental demand, and what districts can actually provide as a well-rounded education causes tremendous tension. Science, the Arts, Social Studies, History, PE, Health Education, and Career Tech take a back seat as we are judged primarily on English and Math proficiency. Yet the consumer base still demands services in all subjects. Taco Bell doesn't serve pizza, and Pizza Hut doesn't serve filet mignon. However, our menu needs to be all encompassing or our customers get upset. They want mass personalized public education — a private tutorial on a public school dollar.

Lack of Control over the Bottom Line

The bottom line is crucial for a business CEO as they balance income and expenses to yield a profit. To do that the corporate leader must be able to control costs and prices. By contrast, the education leader only controls half the equation. In California, school districts receive most of their funding from the state so superintendents have very little influence on the revenue side of the ledger. They spend their time poring over expenses to glean every ounce of productivity so they can stay in balance. And, state law requires them to demonstrate solvency for at least three years even when their funding level is highly unpredictable. We are balancing 2012 budgets on 2000 levels of income. Ninety percent of our budget is spent on people so we have very little wiggle room to avoid layoffs and service reductions to stay in balance. For the past five years we have been doing Donner Party Budgeting in California as we cannibalize our workforce to stay afloat. Imposing a price hike to maintain quality services, staffing and “products” is not an option for a superintendent, but it is for a corporate CEO.

Marketing, Communications and PR on the Cheap

Most businesses spend a lot of money on Marketing, Communications, and Corporate Relations. Not including the cost of sales, it can range up to 30% of a firm's operating expenses, with an average of about 7-10%. In public education we grudgingly spend about 1% of district resources on school communication, (NSPRA data notes that it averages about .001%), community outreach, civic engagement, and public/media relations. Getting your message out to consumers is stock and trade for a corporate CEO. It's a luxury for a school superintendent. Yet the number one reason a superintendent is hired, fired or gets a better job is their ability to communicate with consumers, school boards, employees, and stakeholders. Corporate CEOs, like educational leaders, would find it hard to survive with the paltry amount we spend to get our message out.

Schools are Under-Led

Public schools keep getting accused of having a “Bureaucratic Blob.” Myths, stereotypes and lies about how much money is “wasted” on overhead and administration abound, usually spread by private sector leaders. Yet if you examine the facts, public education has a leaner management structure than almost any other business. I've reviewed Bureau of Labor Statistics figures comparing the number of managers/supervisors to rank and file employees by industry and the data are conclusive. Business has almost twice as much overhead management as public schools. We average about one administrator (including principals) for every 30 employees. Other industries like communications, retailing, media, manufacturing, transportation, construction, etc. have ratios of 1:12 or less. I would suggest that we need more, not less administrators and specialists to lead us forward as an industry. The corporate CEO is used to delegating to a multi-tiered staff structure. The superintendent doesn't have that support system.

Our Product is on the Production Line for 13 years

The quarterly balance sheet is the yardstick for a business leader. For an educator, our success is measured in decades. Our first goal is to get all students to graduate and our ultimate end product is a well-educated young adult with the skills and temperament to succeed in college, a career, and citizenship. Educational leaders need to be patient while maintaining a healthy impatience with status quo

performance. As we invest so much time in each child's future, it might be hard for a private sector CEO to stay the course for over a decade when they have come from a "fiscal year" frame of mind.

You can see Tom's full blog on this topic by going to tomdelapp.blogspot.com

A Dual Investment

In most districts at least 70% of the district's budget is committed to the salaries and benefits of its employees, which is without a doubt a very serious amount of money. Often this percentage is a source of contention with taxpayers. Sometimes I even recall feeling a bit of guilt when discussing the budget with an angry taxpayer. When that happened I would remind myself - **Tax dollars that pay school employees are dually reinvested in the community.** First, by the school employees who live in your community and buy goods and services there. And more importantly, the money is invested in the children of our community who will soon be our community. In both cases our tax dollars remain in our backyards and don't disappear in a bureaucratic office hundreds of miles away. Be proud of that dual investment.

Stand Up for Public Education

Representatives from PSBA shared some introductory information about a new campaign called Stand Up for Public Education at the symposium:

"This outreach campaign is our opportunity to share the good news of public education – the successes, the triumphs and the academic gains our students are making. It will require everyone involved with public education to stand together in the face of unwarranted criticism by those individuals and organizations that would prefer public education just go away. PSBA will share statewide successes but it is imperative for you to share your local story.

The main goal of the "Stand Up for Public Education" campaign is to provide board members, superintendents, administrators, teachers, parents and students with the tools they will need to spread the good word. These resources are available on this website and more tools will be added over time."

<http://standupforpubliceducation.org/>

Register to Vote

Reminder – the last day to register to vote in the primary is Monday, March 26th.

Intern Opportunity

The Allegheny County Intermediate Unit's Communication Services department is currently looking for an intern. The position is temporary, non-paid, and the candidate must be in the process of completing coursework for a post-secondary degree program. Clearances are required, and the AIU can make those arrangements. A job description can be found at: <http://www.aiu3.net/Level3.aspx?id=9676>

News From Around the State and Nation

Well stated editorial from PSBA

<http://www.psba.org/news-publications/headlines/details.asp?id=2621>

A bill is floating in the house that would increase sales and income taxes for schools

<http://paindependent.com/2012/03/pa-seeks-to-swap-property-taxes-with-hikes-in-sales-income-taxes/>

The national high school graduation rate is on the rise

<http://blog.centerforpubliceducation.org/2012/03/19/graduation-rates-on-the-rise/>

A link to over 300 budget cut articles from across the state

http://www.pahouse.com/school_funding_2011cuts.asp?utm_source=Listrak&utm_medium=Email&utm_term=http%3a%2f%2fwww.pahouse.com%2fschool_funding_2011cuts.asp&utm_campaign=Crisis+in+Public+Education

Call to increase funding for arts instruction

http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2012/03/report_by_harrisburg-based_non.html

Update on the Keystone Exams

http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2012/03/gov_tom_corbetts_proposed_chan.html