

Letter: Now is time to improve York County schools**By - 10/26/2007**

I experienced one of life's sad occasions this month when I had to say good-bye to a friend who passed away. Jeff Ruby was an educator, a coach and a man filled with passion. He touched many York kids and made us believe in ourselves. We were black kids, white kids, affluent kids and poor kids, and he made us jell so that we were greater as a unit than just the sum of our individual efforts. He didn't just teach us academics and football plays. He taught us about life, and he was a big part of making us all better people.

It made me recall the lessons I learned growing up on South Street and going through the city schools and how that diversity prepared me for life. I remember our neighborhood had deaf kids, disabled kids and many races. I remember our valedictorian's family moving in from another state and, based on its research, chose — yes, chose — the city schools as the best place to live and send its kids.

When I graduated in 1985, I thought we were on the right track, as demonstrated by the closeness of my high school friends to this day. We have great turnouts at our reunions; we hug each other when we bump into each other, regardless of our status; and our class produced attorneys, engineers, doctors and business executives. It can be that way again, so that successful people don't have to hear that all-too-familiar question of dismay, "You went to York High?"

Just like a team, communities need to work together and jell to be successful in spite of our differences. This is not just a city problem; it's becoming a community problem that does not limit itself to boundaries or districts. The time for action is now, or we will have to deal with the repercussions for years to come.

There are passionate people assembled to address quality-of-life issues in York County, one of them being education. Collectively, this initiative is known as YorkCounts and Metro York. YorkCounts is a coalition of community leaders, business owners and elected officials dedicated to improving the quality of life in York County. Metro York is part of that effort and is charged with developing specific plans to address problems facing the schools and communities in York and the surrounding municipalities.

I am going to join their efforts so that we succeed in improving academics in schools that need it while showing the benefits of diversity to other schools. I hope to see a day when people don't have false perceptions of "good" or "bad" schools because all districts will be similar in makeup and academic achievement.

YorkCounts and Metro York will be announcing recommendations to improve education in the York area in November. I am not asking but challenging you to be open-minded to these suggestions, as York Countians are notorious for resisting change and being naysayers. I'm qualified to say that as I am born and raised here and have seen those tendencies all too often ruin a good idea before it ever has a chance to work.

It's easy to sit back and complain. Successful change requires teamwork, so that together we can be greater than we are as individuals. Which side do you choose to be on: complacency or change for the common good?

—Steve Gohn, York