



## YorkCounts taking on education at public 'summit' next week

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York, PA - YorkCounts prides itself on trying to tackle tough issues facing the community, said Director James DeBord.

"There are few issues that elicit a stronger response than when we start talking about education," he said.

YorkCounts, a nonprofit aimed at enhancing the quality of life in the county, will tackle the topic April 14 with "State of the Schools: A Countywide Summit on Education." The free event will be held at the Pullo Family Performing Arts Center at Penn State York.

DeBord said the organization decided to focus the summit on education after having discussions about what seemed to be at the heart of some of the issues facing the community and what could have the largest impact on quality of life in York County.

The answer they came up with was education, not just for the classic reasons that a better education will help someone land a good job and earn a decent wage, which is good for the community. There are bigger issues, such as teen pregnancy or understanding diversity as a strength, that go back to education, too, he said.

The summit will include a keynote address from Elaine Weiss, national coordinator for the education policy group Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. That campaign is based on the belief that test scores alone do not define school effectiveness, and that schools alone can't tackle the impact that being at a social and economic disadvantage can have on learning, according to information on its website.

The philosophy of Weiss' group matches that of YorkCounts, DeBord said, adding that bigger picture issues -- jobs, housing, safety and so on -- contribute to creating a healthy learning environment for a child.

School district finances will also take center stage at the summit.

A panel of education stakeholders -- school administrators, legislators, and others -- will discuss topics related to the financial situation in York County districts.

Brian Jensen from the Pennsylvania Economy League of Southwestern Pennsylvania will also discuss the looming pension crisis.

Central York teacher Dayna Laur will talk about ways districts can collaborate, particularly for professional development. In difficult financial times, districts are always looking to cut back, she said, and as a teacher, she doesn't want to see professional development decrease.

She'll talk about ways the districts can work together on that, she said, which can save money but also ensure equity across districts.

"I think any capacity in which county is looking to work together collaboratively is a good thing," she said.

DeBord said the community as a whole needs to consider whether there are things that even those districts considered the best in the county could be doing to improve outcomes in education.

"We hope by holding this event and others we'll do in future ... that we're bringing people together to have a civil dialogue about how we improve overall the quality of education," he said.

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