



Education summit sparks discussion on problems facing schools

By **ANGIE MASON**
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York, PA - At "State of the Schools: A Countywide Education Summit" on Thursday an event organized by YorkCounts, community members and education officials talked about issues such as school funding, testing and district collaboration.

YorkCounts planned to gather attendees' feedback on the summit and send it to legislators and school boards, hopefully to help shape their future decisions, said James DeBord, director.

More than 200 people attended the event at Penn State York. If you weren't there, here's a look at what you missed. To add your thoughts on issues posed to a panel of officials, or on other education issues discussed, visit "Schools and education" at The Exchange.

Community schools: To solve the problems in education, everyone has to stop looking for a silver bullet, said Elaine Weiss, with the education reform group Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. The problems are complex, she said, and so are the solutions.

Weiss said research shows that a large part of the achievement gap between low-income and minority children and their peers results from factors outside of school, and gaps start to grow before students get to kindergarten. Schools around the country are beginning to tackle it though, she said.

"A lot of the ingredients are in this room," Weiss said. She spoke of creating community schools, bringing health clinics into buildings, involving community organizations like Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or offering parents English courses or GED classes in the evening with child care provided.

Schools can become community hubs, she said, offering wraparound services for families. She suggested first talking about the consequences of poverty, identifying the biggest problem and

figuring out how to address it.

Funding: Several officials spoke of the need to change the state funding formula and the need for school districts to have a mechanism other than property taxes to raise revenue.

"The taxpayers don't have any more to give," said Rep. Will Tallman, R-Reading Township, Adams County.

Rep. Eugene DePasquale, D-West Manchester Township, called for eliminating the school tax in favor of a more broad base of state taxes.

The state spends about \$12,000 on each student and about \$35,000 on each inmate, he said. Unless that changes, he said, "this discussion is going to be irrelevant."

Dover Area School District Supt. Robert Krantz said there are a lot of inequities in the way schools are funded. The funding formula shortchanges districts that are growing since it is based on old enrollment data, he said, and districts have to deal with mandates that are not funded or not properly funded.

James Testerman, president of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, suggested moving toward a completely different system, such as a personal income tax. In the short term, he said, the state should look at other options such as taxing natural gas extraction.

Collaboration: Dayna Laur, a Central York High

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School teacher who also works in professional development, said districts could save money by thinking of training in terms of collaboration, such as having two teachers attend training and bring that information back for their colleagues or other districts.

Stephen Herzenberg, executive director of the Keystone Research Center, suggested moving toward a more regional approach to education could be among solutions. Schools need to be funded more equitably, he said, with areas of poverty no longer segregated.

Future events

YorkCounts plans to host two more education-centered events by the end of the year, said James DeBord, director. One will be focused on the impact of a concentration of poverty on education, and the other will focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) education.

Testing

Elaine Weiss, of the education reform group Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, said test scores are supposed to show how well a teacher instructs and how well a student absorbs that instruction. But they don't show whether a student is hungry or has only been in that classroom a week.

A focus on testing leads to narrowing of the curriculum, she said, which is detrimental to those children who are least likely to have learning opportunities outside of the classroom.

Tests can be useful, she said, but problems occur in trying to use them to grade teachers and schools.

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