



YDR Opinion: Share knowledge from national school board conference

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"It's not inexpensive."

- Fred Botterbusch, Dallastown school board president, on the costs to send members to the National School Boards Association annual conference.

You can say that again, Mr. Botterbusch.

Even if you don't spend the nearly \$18,000 the York City school board shelled out for members to, ahem, attend the 2009 conference in San Diego (between trips to the zoo and cab rides to fancy restaurants), the bills for that national conference can add up quickly. Airfare, hotel, conference fees, meals etc.

This year, the conference was in pricey San Francisco. (Why don't they ever hold these supposedly working conferences in Des Moines, or Tulsa, or even York? We could use the tourism.)

With most local school district budgets deep into the red, few area districts were planning to send members to the conference last weekend - not Dallastown, not York City, not York Suburban, and not most other local districts.

And that's just as well. None of those boards can afford it this year.

Neither can Central, but it sent representatives to the city by the bay.

Which gives us an idea for cooperation on a regional scale.

Maybe those Central board members could offer other local board members a seminar on "what I learned on my summer vaca...", er, spring conference trip.

If there's valuable information imparted at these conferences - and you would hope there is - why not come back and share that knowledge with other York County school board members?

Maybe there was good information on how to budget in this terrible economic downturn. Maybe the conference offered tips on how to deal with unions to control the relentless upward spiral of teacher salaries (not to mention administrator salaries). Maybe the conference relayed innovations to improve education results.

If so, take notes, bring them back, set a date in the Central high school auditorium, and invite school board members - and the public - from across the county to come learn what the central board members learned.

What's that, you say? Unfair to Central taxpayers who paid for the information and shouldn't have to share it with freeloading districts?

Fine - charge a nominal fee. That would help subsidize Central taxpayers' expenses for the trip, which, remember, "are not inexpensive."

That is, assuming anything is actually learned at these conferences other than, say, what's the best time to visit Fisherman's Wharf or take a drive down Lombard Street.

Seriously, though, this is something that could be organized annually. School boards could have a rotating schedule of who attends the national conference and brings the information back to share with others - sending only competent members who would actually take notes and could put on a coherent presentation.

An admission fee to that seminar could help

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subsidize the cost for the district footing the bill in any particular year.

Just something to think about.

P.S. We're hoping to see lots of local school board members in attendance at YorkCounts' education summit Thursday at Penn State York.

The conference will feature presentations on national, state and local issues. In the afternoon, there will be a panel discussion on the current fiscal environment and the pension crisis, featuring local school officials, members of the General Assembly in Harrisburg, and state education policy experts.

Board members can probably learn as much relevant information there as they could in San Francisco.



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