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YorkCounts focuses on education for 2011 community summit and beyond

York, March 25, 2011 – YorkCounts will turn its 2011 focus to education issues, starting with its annual community summit in April. “State of the Schools: A Countywide Summit on Education” will run from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. April 14 at the Pullo Family Performing Arts Center on the campus of Penn State York. The event will feature a series of morning presentations to lay out the state of education at the national, state and local level, followed after lunch by a panel discussion focusing on district budgets and the current fiscal situations confronting York County schools.

Elaine Weiss, national coordinator for the education policy group Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, will deliver the keynote address and provide the national context. Other morning speakers include Dennis Baughman, who will provide an update on the YorkCounts’ initiative that created the York Academy Regional Charter School; Dayna Laur, an award-winning and nationally recognized Central York teacher, who will talk about new ways districts can collaborate and share resources; and Brian Jensen from the Pennsylvania Economy League of Southwestern Pennsylvania, who will discuss the state’s looming pension crisis.

After lunch, nearly a dozen stakeholders will participate in a panel discussion on the financial situation in our public schools. School districts across the state face unprecedented challenges, from reduced funding support by state government to soaring pension obligations, all while being asked to turn out quality graduates who are part of our county's future. However, the combination of economic challenges has forced every district to consider budget cuts that affect our children's education at every level, from laying off teachers to closing schools.

The panel discussion goal for YorkCounts will be to convene a thoughtful conversation on several important questions. How serious is the financial situation in York County school districts? Are there ways for all county districts to work together - meaningful ways that haven't been explored before - to provide services at lower costs? Are there actions we can take as a community that could help districts carry out their mission to produce high school graduates equipped for the 21st century economy?

Here is a list of confirmed panel discussion participants:

- Thomas Gentzel, executive director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association;
- James Testerman, president of the Pennsylvania State Education Association;
- State Sen. Lloyd Smucker, who represents parts of Lancaster and York counties and serves on the Senate Education and Appropriations committees;
- State Rep. Will Tallman, who represents parts of Adams and York counties and serves on the House Education Committee;
- State Rep. Eugene DePasquale, who represents York and parts of Spring Garden and West Manchester townships;
- Robert Krantz, superintendent of Dover Area School District;
- George Ioannidis, business manager for Spring Grove Area School District;
- Judy Higgins, Eastern York school board member and board president of Lincoln Intermediate Unit 12;
- Stephen Herzenberg, executive director of the Keystone Research Center;
- Joel Sears, president of the York County Taxpayers Council.

YorkCounts hopes to leave the event with a set of actionable recommendations that it will pass along to the York County delegation of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, as well as local school districts and all key stakeholders.

The event is free, and advance registration is required. Discounted boxed lunches will be available during the lunch break for \$5. To register, send an e-mail with your name, phone number and the school district in which you reside to events@yorkcounts.org by Thursday, April 7. When you register, please indicate your lunch preference from these wrap choices: turkey, ham, chicken salad, tuna salad or veggie. For more information, contact Dan Fink at 717-650-1460 or dfink@yorkcounts.org.

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YorkCounts is a community-based nonprofit working to assess, sustain and enhance York County's quality of life – building alliances, introducing partners, spotlighting issues and facilitating conversations on education, economic development, health and safety and diversity. Partners include Better York, the United Way of York County, WellSpan Health, the York County Commissioners, the York County Community Foundation, the York County Economic Development Corp. and Glatfelter Insurance Group. Learn more at yorkcounts.org.

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