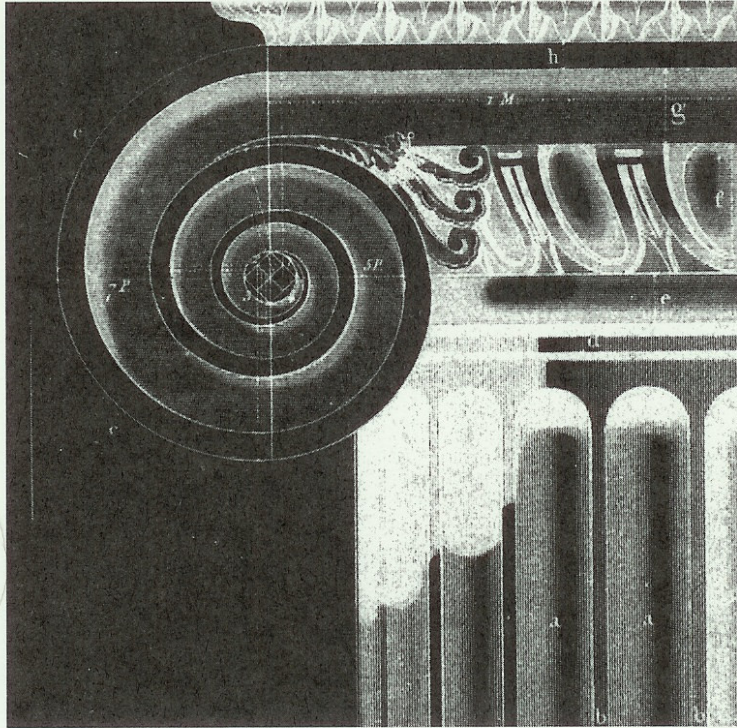


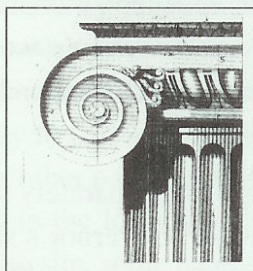
# Institute of Politics



## Status Report: K-12 Educational Policy in Pennsylvania

Bruce Barron  
June 1996

The Status Report is a new publication of the Institute of Politics and is an occasional briefing paper that up-dates the major topics examined in Institute forums. Educational policy in Pennsylvania is the subject of the Institute's first Status Report



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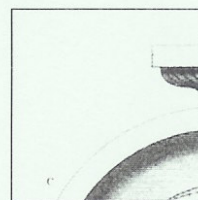
### Overview: Education policy in Pennsylvania

This status report will explore four areas of educational policy charter schools, privatization, workforce development, and school equity — each of these areas have been the subject of Institute of Politics forums in recent years. In this status report the Institute returns to these issues to get the views of key leaders, including many of the participants in those forums, on the status of education reform in Pennsylvania. These leaders' perspectives offer important insights into policy debates that are crucial to Pennsylvania's future.

It's always easier to show the need for change than to create a consensus on which changes should be implemented. That dynamic has dominated education reform in Pennsylvania, causing most changes to move at a snail's pace, if at all.

Governor Tom Ridge attempted to set the agenda for education reform during his first year in office by combining several elements into a comprehensive package, known as KIDS (Keystone Initiative for a Difference in our Schools). His plan addressed relief from state mandates, teacher tenure and sabbaticals, and technology improvements. However, those issues were overshadowed by one high-profile element: a school-choice (voucher) proposal that encompassed nonpublic schools

In his initial plan, Ridge proposed giving a voucher worth \$700 at the elementary and \$1,000 at the secondary level to the family of any student attending a private school. This proposal raised the already high stakes in education reform, pitting powerful interest groups against each other, with Catholic schools and Pennsylvania's two major teacher unions the most visible players. In the end, however, the plan fell six votes short of passage in the State House.



Ridge released a revised proposal in November 1995, in which he tightened the income eligibility guidelines for private-school vouchers, increased the grant amount per student, and added a provision guaranteeing that public schools would not receive less funding due to student use of vouchers. The plan died in the House, and Ridge abandoned his efforts to pass school-choice legislation.

Meanwhile, the House began addressing separately several of the other components from Ridge's package, though not always to the Governor's satisfaction. Most notably, in the area of **charter schools**, the House unanimously passed a bill that state education secretary Eugene Hickok recommended that Ridge veto if it reached his desk in the Houses' form. Further changes are anticipated in the State Senate, and the initiation of any charter schools in Pennsylvania will be delayed at least until the 1997-1998 school year.

On another front, in Wilkinsburg, a nationally prominent educational experiment in **privatization** moved forward this year as its school board contracted with Alternative Public Schools to provide education at Turner Elementary School. This was the first case in the nation where a school's complete teaching staff was furloughed and a private company was permitted to bring in its own set of teachers. The board reviewed several options. Including one from the teachers' union (in conjunction with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education) and chose to contract with APS instead.

The Ridge administration supported the board's desire to pursue privatization, and a legal challenge was turned aside two weeks before school opened. A local organization, Wilkinsburg Residents Against Profiteering (WRAP), formed to oppose the move, but in a high profile election battle last November, privatization supporters maintained a majority on the board. It is too early to draw substantiated conclusions about APS's performance, but the company expects to fulfill its five-year contract to run the school. Its profits remain in escrow for the first two years while an independent evaluator determines whether APS has achieved agreed-upon goals.

The area of education reform showing greatest activity is **workforce development**, partly due to a major influx of federal funds. Pennsylvania was selected among the second wave of states to receive federal school-to-work implementation grants, and about \$5 million was awarded to local school-to-work partnerships (17 of them in southwest Pennsylvania) this spring. In addition, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center has received a \$1.5 million federal grant to support school-to-work implementation throughout the region.

School-to-work is only one segment of workforce-development activity, however. The Greater Pittsburgh Working Together Consortium has empowered a major initiative, chaired by Jane Burger of the Grable Foundation, to "Connect Workers and Students to the Jobs of the Future." This initiative, aimed at assisting employers and the incumbent workforce as well as future workers, has begun to address the essential need of coordinating workforce development with economic development, so that education leads to high-quality jobs and so that our region's economy can find workers with the skills it needs in order to grow.

In contrast to the workforce-development arena, the debate over **school equity** continues with minimal progress. The lawsuit filed in 1991 by the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS), charging the state with unconstitutional inequity in public-school funding, is scheduled for trial in August. An advisory commission formed by Governor Ridge has held hearings and submitted a report in May to Commonwealth Court Judge Dan Pelligrini, who is now presiding over the case, however, other parties found the commission's recommendations lacking. With state tax reform caught in the logjam and the percentage of education funding covered by the state budget continuing to slip, some believe the inequities are only getting worse. Nobody wants to see the dispute proceed to trial, but few foresee a resolution without one.

## **Charter Schools: The path is still being charted**

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When Pennsylvania Education Secretary Eugene Hickok testified before the State House Education Committee in October 1995, he called charter schools "the focus of a growing consensus among policy makers."

Five months later, the House passed a charter schools bill by 199-0, but Secretary Hickok was not part of the consensus, announcing that he would recommend that Governor Ridge veto the bill if it reached him in its current form.

The lopsided House vote masks the fact that key issues related to the operation of charter schools remain unresolved. Representative Jess Stairs of Mt. Pleasant, Westmoreland County, chair of the House Education Committee, explained that "we took a lot of time in committee to work out **our** differences," but then described several issues that may be at variance with the executive branch:

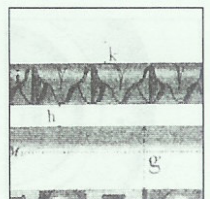
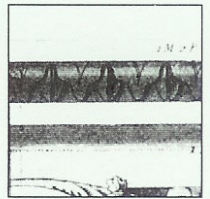
- The House bill does not permit for-profit companies to run a charter school. The Ridge Administration had previously said that it would like such companies to be able to do so.
- The Ridge administration wanted the Secretary of Education to have the power to overrule a school board's denial of a charter application in their district. According to the House language, the Secretary can only order a local referendum on the application.
- The House maintained a requirement that at least 75 percent of a charter school's teachers be certified and limited charter schools' ability to obtain waivers of state regulations.

## **Will anyone accept the deal?**

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Stairs was hesitant to predict how many charters would result under the guidelines in the House bill. "There could be 2 or 102," he said. "If after a few years we found there weren't any charters, we'd look at the issue again."

Others, however, describe the House bill as a "weak" version of charter-school legislation, compared to that in states (such as Arizona and Michigan) that have seen the greatest number of charter schools formed.



Stinson Stroup, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, says the discussion of charter schools in this state has been “a very open process,” but one that has revealed inherent problems in developing charter legislation. Since no state money is being designated for charter schools, he explained, the financial responsibility for their operation would rest with the local school district. “There was reluctance to mandate an organizational structure that localities would have to pay for but not control,” he noted. “Accordingly, the school board remains the gatekeeper as to whether a charter will be granted.”

Stroup also would like to see greater leeway for charter schools to receive waivers from state regulations and mandates. He cited Pennsylvania’s special-education regulations, which go beyond federal requirements, as a factor that would hinder charter schools’ freedom to operate in new ways.

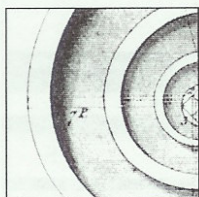
On the positive side Stroup named, as two “areas of significant flexibility” contained within the House bill, the opportunity to hire 25 percent uncertified teachers and the fact that a charter school would not be covered by its sponsoring district’s collective-bargaining agreements.

As for who would be likely to operate a charter school, Stroup commented, “Organizing a school is a lot of work, and I don’t know how many people have the staying power. Most of the interest I hear is from school districts who are interested in converting one building to charter-school status, especially if they could bypass state regulations by doing so.”

Stroup and Jeremy Resnick, who has been selected to develop a charter-school support organization for Duquesne University’s Institute for Economic Transformation, indicated that a few private schools could convert to charter status. However, as Resnick explained, these schools would lose their right to enroll students selectively, with the often unsatisfactory result that, if applications exceed the number of openings, even existing students would be forced into a lottery for available slots.

Resnick predicted that if school boards are the only authorizing entity, “the only charter schools we’ll see will be alternative education, dropout retrieval, and a few arts magnets. We won’t see schools forming to compete with the core education offered by public schools now.” This pattern has occurred in other states with “weak” charter legislation, said Resnick. In contrast, he stated, universities have been key sponsors of charter schools where states permitted them to play that role, and Arizona has created a separate board whose sole function is to approve charter schools.

## **Teachers: “We don’t want to block reform”**



Stairs and Butch Santicola, director of organizing and communications specialist for the Pennsylvania State Education Association, both found it ironic that some of the same voices calling for tighter teacher-certification requirements also want to permit charter schools to operate with uncertified teachers.

Santicola said the PSEA considers the House bill “somewhat more regressive with regard to public involvement” than in other states, but he said the PSEA has not taken a position on the legislation. He stressed heavily that his organization does not wish to oppose reform.

“We’re not going to reject education reform,” Santicola said. “We want to be careful not to throw out the good that’s going on, but we don’t want to be the blockers of change.”

Santicola praised the charter-school program in Colorado, where 14 schools are operating in conjunction with teacher associations. Colorado is one of six states where the National Education Association plans to start its own charter schools this fall.

Santicola said the two sources of increased flexibility cited by Stroup—hiring uncertified teachers and freedom from a district’s bargaining agreements—would be major concerns for the 137,000-member PSEA, whose agenda he described as “truly member-driven.” Teachers, he said, “are concerned about their future. For those who went into teaching 10 or 15 years ago, the atmosphere is quite different now.”

While charter schools will permit experimentation, Stroup offered a reminder that they will solve only a small piece of the education reform problem. “This bill will not reform the whole system, nor will any charter school bill,” he said. “It is a small step that will affect only a small percentage of students.”

## Privatization: The debate

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Supporters and opponents agree that recent attempts to “privatize” educational services by public schools have taught important lessons, but they do not agree on what those lessons are.

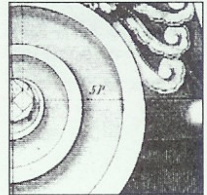
Jeremy Resnick, a former teacher who advised the Wilkinsburg School Board’s Turner School Initiative through the negotiation of its contract with Alternative Public Schools (APS)—the private company that entered Turner Elementary in fall 1995—believes that, with appropriate assignment of responsibility and accountability, privatization can work.

To Butch Santicola, director of organizing for the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), the lesson is that teachers must become more proactive in their community involvement so that more school districts do not commit the error of privatization.

Resnick prefers to describe APS’s involvement in Wilkinsburg as contracting for instructional services. “To call it privatization suggests that the school board turned over its responsibility, which is not true,” he says. “It’s just a public school board deciding to do things in a different way.” He points out that many school districts contract with private companies for substitute teachers (a common practice in eastern Pennsylvania) or for special-education or vocational services.

While it is still too early to evaluate APS’s achievement in Wilkinsburg, Resnick believes the arrangement there has avoided key errors committed by other privatization experiments, such as those in Baltimore and Hartford.

“Private companies are bad at managing bureaucracy,” Resnick says. “In Hartford, where the private firm was asked to come in and build a budget, they couldn’t do it. In Baltimore, the company did not pick its own teachers and tried to function within the existing work rules; they found that, if they tried to make the system better without changing it, they would fail. In contrast, APS has said the system is fundamentally flawed and that it can operate a school successfully and accountably as long as it has the control.”

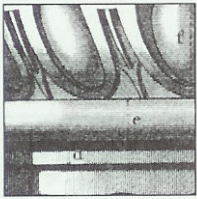


Although Resnick acknowledges that contracting with a non-profit rather than a for-profit company would have eliminated one complicating factor in Wilkinsburg, he does not see an unavoidable conflict between the goals of public education and a for-profit concern as long as expectations are appropriately structured. APS, he explains, will have its profits retained in escrow for the first two years of its five-year contract and will not receive any money unless specified goals, including test score improvements and increased parent involvement, are met.

Santicola speaks less favorably of the APS-Wilkinsburg contract. "If the remaining elementary schools were given the same options as APS, their performance would go up as well," he says. For example, he notes that the contract permits APS to exclude transient students—those who fail to attend school regularly—in its measurements of student performance.

## **School-To-Work: Workforce development projects are looking up**

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"We have moved from the crawling to the toddler stage," says Rob Rogers of school-to-work and workforce-development activities in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Rogers sits, as much as anyone, at the nerve center of workforce development in the Pittsburgh region. As director of Allegheny County's Commission for Workforce Excellence, he keeps an eye on all the federal, state, and local initiatives seeking to impact the readiness of the region's workforce.

Rogers sees numerous reasons for encouragement. At the regional planning level, he is encouraged by the progress of the Working Together Consortium's effort to "Connect Workers and Students to the Jobs of the Future," chaired by Jane Burger of the Grable Foundation. "I see there an effort to do two key things," he notes: "to develop a regional training agenda, and to link workforce-development with economic-development strategies so that they are mutually rather than randomly supportive of each other."

Rogers also expressed optimism about a forthcoming study, funded by the Heinz Endowment, to examine the market for a regional education and training clearinghouse that could match employers' training needs with specific programs available. "Our goal is to connect needs with programs as efficiently as possible," he says.

Tom Murrin, dean of Duquesne University's School of Business Administration, praises the Working Together Consortium, saying "it is finally starting to do some high-potential good." He also highlights the need to coordinate workforce development and economic development.

"Almost unanimously," Murrin notes, promising businesses in this area say their greatest constraint is their inability to find qualified workers. Nobody has a systematic understanding of our future needs, so we get results like a 20-year supply of hairdressers and an absence of machinists and welders."

Murrin believes that better information on future workforce needs will enable the American people to solve this problem without forcing students into specific fields. "We have

missed communicating the excitement of being a world-class machinist or computer repair specialist," he says. "Some kids may still say they want to be a brain surgeon—even if the tests indicate they lack the ability—but, for the most part, I think our people will respond to information."

Ester Bush, president of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, has particular praise for the Consortium subcommittee addressing summer employment issues. "Only one or two other cities in the country are making similar efforts to get out in front of the summer employment problem," she says. "I think the threat of federal money disappearing has frightened people into approaching the issue creatively."

Bush believes the school-to-work movement's commitment to "talking about education and work in the same breath" will particularly help inner-city youths become suited for employment. She also feels that increasing the minimum wage could have a significant impact, "you have to give these youths a viable alternative to what they're exposed to on the street."

## Legislative impact

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Rogers sees welfare reform affecting Pennsylvania's use of available workforce-development funds. "Governor Ridge has turned caseworkers into job developers," he explains. "It used to be that almost anyone on welfare could be funded for an associate degree program, but now only a maximum of 20 percent of the caseload can receive one year of training. As a result, providers are changing patterns that were formerly sacrosanct, finding ways to squeeze their training programs into tighter time blocks."

"I think we could have served twice as many people all along," Rogers continues, "if we had had institutions that were willing to reshape themselves as is happening now. Shorter programs also push people to make commitments that are not sustained as often in longer programs. The danger, however, is that we may end up giving many people enough support only to get them halfway into a new career."

Ray Christman, president of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Council (SPIRC) and the Pittsburgh High Technology Council, stresses the redirection of educational resources, especially community colleges, as part of a coordinated economic- and workforce-development strategy. "In many states community colleges have become the main institutions meeting business's short-term training needs," he says. "We need to use the community-college system as an economic-development tool."

Christman also believes Pennsylvania must offer financial incentives to encourage businesses to assist in the training and retraining of workers, and he emphasizes that, within the regional agenda, training needs for the incumbent workforce are as important as those of future workers.

While federal legislation to consolidate workforce-development programs was delayed in House-Senate conference for much of the current session, Pennsylvania has benefited from its selection for the second wave of five-year federal school-to-work implementation grants. Pennsylvania received nearly \$6.5 million this year and distributed about \$5 million of those funds to local partnerships that formed across the state, including five in Allegheny County and 17 in the southwest region.

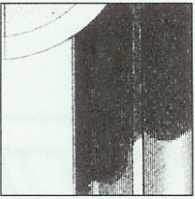


Although many of these partnerships remain in the formative stage, Michael Snyder, school-to-work liaison for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, believes the program has already begun to have its desired impact. "The number and breadth of players who have come to the table are significant," Snyder states.

Many partnerships, Snyder says, have begun surveying the local business community to see what role business leaders can play to help build an educational system that will meet their needs. Snyder has urged partnerships to start by analyzing their career-development plans. The state, he says, is developing a computerized tool that will guide schools in this analysis and will offer over 150 resources to help them fill the gaps they discover.

## Not everyone's on board

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While the workforce-development agenda has gained broad support, some discordant voices remain. Among the most prominent in Pennsylvania is Peg Luksik, two-time candidate for governor.

Luksik objects to directing students into college or non-college tracks at increasingly early ages; to the fine print in many of the state-federal contracts she has examined, such as one that required weakening of child labor laws; to the likelihood of increased educational spending as federal funds dry up; to the mediocrity she says she has found where an emphasis on *every* student attaining minimal outcomes forces teachers to spend more time with lagging students; and to the move toward major educational restructuring before the results of these programs have been adequately documented. Her core concern, however, is over what she considers an erosion of parents' voice in the schools.

"We have businesses saying that schools exist to serve them, and that they should be able to tell schools what skills are needed," Luksik says. "Business should certainly be involved in the schools as a stakeholder, in an advisory capacity, but it is not the primary customer."

Luksik opposes efforts to set national standards that determine what each child should learn before entering the workforce. "States traditionally set standards for school districts and made sure that certain instructional requirements were met," Luksik says. "But [national standards projects] are setting standards not for schools, but for individual children. That's a fundamental difference in structure, because it gives the state power to mandate what each child must learn."

Rogers expresses appreciation for some of Luksik's concerns, particularly with regard to the importance of informed, local support for change. "If a government body becomes too prescriptive about its plans or attaches public funding to their acceptance, local constituencies should fight tooth and nail," he says. "To the degree that we can't refine standards to meet the test of reality, they shouldn't be adopted. But the potential for leadership groups to overreach should not cause us to cut them off. That is shortsighted and promotes chaos."

Says Christman, "Business should not run the schools, but it should be more directly and meaningfully involved. For many years, business has had a limited and superficial participation at best; now business is becoming more systematically involved because of its stake in how students turn out.

“I think school-to-work is potentially the most important educational reform at this time,” Christman asserts, “and if business is not a co-equal partner in it, it will fail.”

Snyder agrees that parents should be the key players in any school system, “but in reality we see very few parents involved, and we don’t have mechanisms to force them to come to the table.”

Snyder and Rogers agree on the need for greater public engagement if workforce-development efforts are to succeed. “If we have the willingness,” Rogers concludes, “we will find the leadership and the resources, and the marketplace will identify the best ideas. If that happens, we will have launched a real revolution.”

## Equity Financing: Remains a riddle

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How do you increase support for Pennsylvania’s struggling school districts, without taking resources from more affluent districts and without raising taxes?

Oh, and by the way, you can’t infringe on local control either. That’s the essence of the school equity problem in Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS), which filed suit over the state’s school funding formula in 1991, has proposed a 2.5 percent statewide income tax, perhaps accompanied by a 1 percent hike in the sales tax, to fund education. These levies would enable most school districts to eliminate property taxes.

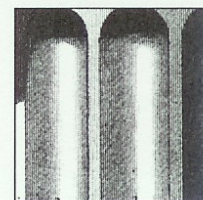
Carmen Sarnicola has been part of the PARSS suit since the beginning, originally as a plaintiff representing the Clairton School District, where he was superintendent. Now co-director of the Mon Valley Education Consortium, he is also on the PARSS board and remains deeply concerned about the impact of funding inequities on poorer districts.

“This is a complex problem that has been going on for 25 years” since the state’s portion of regular education funding began falling below 50 percent, Sarnicola says.

“Too many people are looking to plug a number into a formula and make everything okay. Even if the state guaranteed 50 percent funding for regular education, we would still need a separate pot to cover the costs of special education.” Noting that these costs are usually higher in socioeconomically distressed districts, Sarnicola believes that gifted education should not be included in this special-education pot.

Sarnicola has taken on the task of explaining to others, including wealthier school districts, why this should be an issue of concern to them as well. “If this equity problem continues to grow, and if the have-not communities and districts continue to increase, we will create an even bigger underclass than already exists,” he states. “It’s only a matter of time before we have an explosion.”

Sarnicola says that, through discussions and hearings related to the suit, more of the “have” districts are becoming interested in seeing the problem resolved. “We’re not trying to get a computer for every kid,” he says. “We’re saying there are basic needs that some children don’t have access to, that [wealthier school districts] thought that they did.”



Linda Croushore, Sarnicola's colleague at the Mon Valley Education Consortium, emphasizes that her organization has not simply wrung their hands while the equity debate has floundered without resolution. "We've been looking at how to reallocate existing funds and apply community resources to accomplish solutions without increasing the tax burden on local communities," Croushore said. "You can't use lack of money as an excuse to bypass a generation of children."

Ronald Tomalis, executive deputy secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, places the issue in a different light. While others focus on the projected cut in the state share of education funding (from 37.2 to 35.6 percent), Tomalis points out that Governor Ridge's proposed budget for 1996–1997 held steady the portion of the total state budget devoted to education at 43 percent.

"This is an extremely tight budget year," Tomalis explains. "We've tried to maintain our commitment to education. Our \$120 million school technology proposal represents one of our main funding initiatives."

William Cooley, director of Pennsylvania Educational Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, supports increased state funding and tax reform, but adds that local cooperation could make a difference even if nothing happened at the state level.

In discussing his research Cooley said, "I have shown that Allegheny County has an adequate tax base to support all 43 of its school districts." "Countywide tax-sharing could eliminate our equity problems—and ours is a particularly serious case, since that is where most of the bankrupt or near-bankrupt districts in the state are located."

Cooley acknowledges, however, that his proposals for countywide cooperation can only run aground in the political maelstrom of Allegheny County's 43 school districts and 130 municipalities.

"We need to show employers living in more affluent areas," Cooley says, "that their enlightened self-interest should cause them to be concerned about school districts that their own children may not attend but their future employees do. We have to look beyond our own children and see that it hurts our region to have districts that are not functioning effectively for lack of resources."

Helen Sobehart, acting superintendent of the Fox Chapel Area School District, shares Cooley's sense that closer collaboration could benefit all parties, but points out that current state policies do not encourage this collaboration. She says the state advised the Fox Chapel Area and Riverview districts, when they were involved in an intergovernmental study, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Economy League, about what their aid ratio status would be if they were financially combined. The ESBE aid ratio would have been the same for the combined district as it currently is for Fox Chapel Area, which has the lowest aid ratio allowable. The result would have been less ESBE funds flowing into the combined district total than the two currently receive as individual districts.

Fox Chapel Area is a member of the "intervenor" group of school districts who have affiliated in response to the PARSS suit. Sobehart believes that the two groups of districts share a desire

to see the state find a solution, but she warns that simple redistribution of funds could cause districts like her own (which includes lower-income boroughs of Sharpsburg and Blawnox) to suffer while poorer districts remained limited in their ability to generate income.

Sobehart, and William Pope superintendent at Upper St. Clair—like Fox Chapel area or relatively affluent districts—both add that local control of schools encourages community involvement. While acknowledging that the current system contains “a great duplication of responsibility,” Pope also notes that community-based districts “appeal to civic pride as we try to outdo each other. I don’t know what would happen to this incentive if we became four regional school districts [in the county].”

Pope says resistance to regionalization in communities like his own would be fierce. “People moved here because they want a good school system and are willing to pay for it,” he states. At the same time, he adds, “It doesn’t make sense to replicate the educational delivery system 501 times” in Pennsylvania.

“If a rational solution is perceived as people losing their community identity, look out,” says Sobehart, pointing to the battle over a countywide 911 system as an example. She believes that “we need to strike a balance between community identification with schools, which I think is healthy, and the need to run our schools more efficiently.”

Pope is concerned that actions like the PARSS suit could increase tension between “have” and “have-not” communities, but says change must start at the state level. “The people of Upper St. Clair don’t feel responsible for the status of education in Duquesne,” he states. “Kids should not suffer simply because of where they were born, but it will take adults to address that problem. I don’t see a willingness to grapple with that. Right now I see everyone running and hiding.”

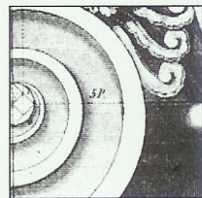
In the meantime, the Mon Valley Education Consortium leaders believe increased youth crime and racial tensions are among the consequences of educational inequity. “These things are happening,” says Croushore, “because there is a large segment of our population that believes it has no hope of ever competing on a fair playing field with the rest of society.”

## **In Summary: the Road Ahead**

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At an Institute of Politics forum on site-based management earlier this year, State Representative Ron Cowell, minority chair of the House Education Committee, reminded participants that their school-reform planning could not ignore a broader public and legislative context that is not always friendly to their ideas.

First, Cowell noted, his committee was having to spend much of its time not in pursuing new reforms, but debating legislation that would repeal changes such as the state’s prescribed learning outcomes. He then questioned whether the education sector has performed its public-engagement task adequately. “The only place where we mandate public involvement is in the strategic planning process,” he said, “and some school districts deal with that by burying one parent in a subcommittee. There are even districts where you have to sign up a week in advance just to speak at a school board meeting.”

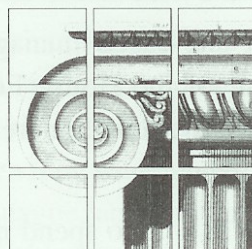


Cowell's remarks highlighted the communication gap that continues to typify education-reform discussions in Pennsylvania. There's a lot of talk about change, but public engagement and support for these efforts has seldom been visible. A second key, complicating factor is that the Ridge administration and education leaders have widely divergent education-reform agendas, as reflected not only in the bruising school-choice debate but also in the areas of charter-school legislation and school finance.

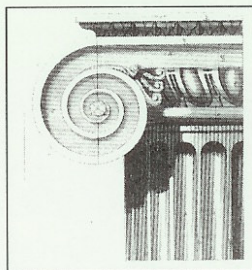
Several other recurring themes emerge from this status report on the education landscape in Pennsylvania:

- The charge of “untested” strengthens resistance to a variety of reform efforts, including experimental schools, privatization, and education restructuring.
- The area of workforce development is seeing progress, largely because major stakeholders have achieved broader consensus that something must be done and are starting to work together.
- Funding decisions, more than philosophical considerations, often appear to be the primary factor determining which reforms can move forward. Infusion of funds has propelled the school-to-work movement, while the lack of available funds has reduced legislative options for charter schools and frozen the school-equity problem. Accordingly, tax reform and education reform are inextricably related.
- Pennsylvanians' preference for local control strongly impacts the viability of education reforms, across the state and especially in Allegheny County.
- Teachers unions, while desiring to be a partner in reform, remain a powerful obstacle to changes that would weaken their bargaining position.

The process is ponderously slow and will likely continue to include zigzags as the balance of power shifts between political parties and among stakeholders, but Pennsylvania will also benefit from the accumulated experience of other states. Among the current set of options, however, which ones Pennsylvania will select—and whether they will have the public support to make a real difference for its students—remains to be decided.



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