

Good afternoon...my name is Kelly Hastings and I am the Superintendent of the Keystone Central School District in Clinton County (better known as the home of the champion Keystone Little League team you'll want to be sure and watch in the world series play-offs tomorrow). It's a great honor to be here today to speak with you and to represent the Superintendents and the school districts in Central Intermediate Unit #10. We are proud to serve as the educational leaders of the children in Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton Counties, and we are committed to helping all of our students reach their academic and personal goals. We are also very passionate about the issues being discussed today, and the impact that the decisions coming from Harrisburg can and are having on our ability to provide the educational opportunities our children and their families want and need.

And frankly, I struggled for a long time trying to decide how to best organize my remarks to you in order to help you understand our concerns, while at the same time making sure that they do not come across as self-serving rhetoric aimed at preserving the public school bureaucracy. I also knew that as the last speaker on what I believe is the last day of the hearings around these issues, that by the time I got to speak to you, you would likely have heard it all, and maybe even be a little bit tired of it all. I also know that opponents and proponents of public schools, charter schools and vouchers could sit here all day and sling mud at one another in an effort to make their side look good and the other side look bad. And I am also well aware that these decisions are not easy ones and are not made easier by insults and finger pointing,...not when children's very lives and futures are at stake.

So let's just start by getting a few things out of the way...there are good public schools and there are bad public schools, there are good charter schools and there are bad charter schools, and there are good private schools and there are bad private schools. There are teachers in all of these schools who are fantastic and motivate and inspire students every day...and there are teachers in all of these schools who are not the committed professionals we need working with our students. There are administrators who are instructional leaders who know that supervision is about making teachers better at what they do so students can achieve at high levels...and there are administrators who don't know good instructional design from bad, and believe their job is one of management (or often times mismanagement) alone. And we must also recognize that there are parents committed to their child's education who really are looking for a setting that better meets their child's needs, and there are parents who use and abuse the system out of anger or an attempt to avoid their own responsibility as partners in the educational process. And likely everyone can find studies and data that supports their own position relative to the benefit or detriment of the various proposals. I believe that if we are all really honest...we can agree that all of this is true. I think we can also agree that regardless of whatever other options are made available for students, a sound public school system is a must in our democracy...and that public money should be spent to promote the public good.

So if we can agree to all of these things...and know that there is plenty of credit and plenty of blame to go around, it would seem that we could find a way to drill this thing down and identify the real issues at play. And I think the bottom line is

this...it's not that wanting to provide choice is a bad thing or that maintaining a solid public school system shouldn't be a priority, the real issue is how do we best implement these ideas in a way that will get us the results we need. And I believe that the solution lies in not just having a plan, but in the implementation of that plan. Because a program, even one that people are passionate about, will not succeed if the implementation plan has not been thoughtfully and carefully developed.

I'll take you to the classroom for an illustration of this point...we all know that students who are economically disadvantaged are very bright and very capable...however, they often lack the background knowledge that would help them be successful in school. And we also know that the research clearly says that teaching students academic vocabulary is critical to building their background. But it is academic vocabulary taught in a particular way...and likely that way is not how you and I were taught...(let's see if your vocabulary instruction in high school was anything like mine...) Here's a list of words. Look them up in the glossary. Write down the definitions. Study the definitions. Take the test. Look up the next list of words in the glossary...repeat. Sound familiar? Now that teacher can say they are teaching vocabulary...but the instruction is so poorly designed and the implementation is so far off the mark, that little real learning is taking place.

Let's look at another example more in line with the kinds of decisions you are faced with today...the implementation of No Child Left Behind or NCLB...the federal education law currently in place. The underlying premise was sound; create an education system that ensures that ALL children receive a quality education as we

work to narrow the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Certainly a worthy goal that no one could argue with...however, because politics rather than sound educational decision making drove the implementation of the plan, NCLB has not delivered on its promises. Rather than focusing on curriculum and instruction, NCLB focuses on accountability; test kids, shame teachers, and close schools appears to be the focus of the policies around NCLB. The curriculum has narrowed, the testing system consists of "apples and oranges" comparisons as every state has a different test, and statistically impossible goals have set the entire system up for failure. The rallying cry becomes that we are losing ground with other educational systems around the globe...yet no successful system in any other country has imposed narrowly focused policies like NCLB onto their schools.

Certainly, Pennsylvania does not want to follow in the footsteps of NCLB and enact legislation that has not been carefully thought out or does not have a sound plan for implementation. If there is to be accountability for the public schools, there must be equal accountability measures for any charter or publically funded private entity...and the measure to test them must be the same...if public schools are being measured by the PSSA, so must any publically funded school be measured by the same yardstick. If these choices for students are going to exist, then they must be funded at adequate levels to support academic achievement for all students without undermining the funding for public schools...our current funding formulas must be examined and restructured to provide fair and equitable support to all students. And if mandates are good for the proverbial goose, they are equally good for the gander...public schools cannot be expected to compete when the playing field is far

from level. All publically funded educational institutions should be required to function under the same set of regulations or, if relief is given to one entity, it should be given to them all.

The other equally important thing I would beg you to do is to look at whether or not the current reform efforts you are considering for education are even the areas where our precious time, efforts, and money should be spent. In the early 80's, the report *A Nation At Risk* was released and caused a firestorm of negativity toward public education. But if you examine this report, it gave some basic recommendations to improve our public schools: 1. Strengthen the curriculum for all students. 2. Set clear and reasonable high school graduation requirements that demonstrate readiness for higher education or the workplace. 3. Improve the quality of instructional materials and tests. 4. Increase the amount of time students spend doing schoolwork. It would seem that all of our current reform efforts, more testing, choice, accountability, and competition are far removed from any of these recommendations.

It begs the question...are we leaning our ladder against the wrong wall? Has fear, obedience, and the demand for higher test scores replaced real improvement efforts that would make a difference in student's lives? Has our quest for a quick fix relegated curriculum and instruction, which should be at the heart of any reform effort, to the back seat?

In an effort to find the answer to these and other of life's compelling questions, I've been turning my thoughts to the Clinton County Keystone Little League

champions...which if I happened to have forgotten to mention will be appearing soon at a little league world series near you ...and those great kids, students at one of my middle schools, have taught me a lot about teamwork and getting things done. First, it's clear that people are considered the most valuable resource to that team and that the development of those team members through support and hard work was the priority as those kids have been together on that team for many years. Second, the Keystone team works together. It was always interesting to watch how the kids supported one another and different players would be the leader of the group on different days. And probably most importantly, the Keystone team never gave up. They stayed focused on their mission and didn't let small setbacks divert them from their goal.

We would be wise to do the same. Keep our focus on improving achievement and enact reform efforts that bring about real success. Value the people involved in education and support them in ways that will make them better at what they do. And realize that giving up on the public schools is not an option...that any reform effort that undermines public education is ill conceived and will not improve the quality of education for Pennsylvania's children. The only real difference between our team and Keystone Little League is that in our game there can be no losers.

I thank you for your kind attention, and wish you well as you work to make Pennsylvania a great place to live, work, and learn.