

**Legislative Report**  
**Submitted by Linda Bishop**  
**October 24, 2012**

Mrs. Grosheider and I attended the PSBA/PASA School Leadership Conference in Hershey PA last week. There were excellent professional development sessions and many opportunities for collaboration and information exchange with board members from other districts in western Pennsylvania and across the state. At the Legislative Policy Council meeting, we debated and adopted our legislative advocacy platform for the year, which is heavily focused on the need for pension reform, for charter/cyber school funding reform, and for significant mandate relief for public schools. We had some very informative breakout sessions on the current political and legislative scene, both state and federal. A few conference highlights:

1. Mrs. Grosheider was one of seven school board members from across PA to be awarded PSBA Master School Board Member accreditation. This program, which has been in place for five years, is designed to recognize school directors who have demonstrated exceptional accomplishments in attaining the goals of effective governance. Those selected completed a rigorous application process through which they highlighted their board service, community engagement, advocacy and teamwork skills. Congratulations to Mrs. Grosheider!
2. NA students made us very proud! Owen Jin, a third grade student at McKnight Elementary, was a statewide winner in the PSBA Poster and Essay Contest. His poster, "What Public Education Means to Me", was prominently displayed in the Lobby throughout the conference. The NA Golden Strolling Strings dazzled the audience with their performance at the Student Celebration Showcase, which featured student vocal, instrumental, and dance performers from across the state. Many thanks to our NA students and staff members who traveled all the way to Hershey and back on a school night to showcase our excellent orchestra program! For those who would like to see the performance, we were notified that it will be rebroadcast on PCN on Oct. 27 at 5 p.m.
3. We elected new officers and adopted a major bylaw revision for PSBA, including a complete overhaul of its governance structure. These changes have been in the works for two years. PSBA's Executive Director, Tom Gentzel, who played a major role in bringing about this change, will be leaving PSBA to become executive director of the National School Boards Association. Tom has been with PSBA for 32 years.

Mrs. Grosheider and I spent a large part of our time in Hershey engaged in direct legislative advocacy work. The General Assembly was in session and was considering HB 1115, a charter school "reform" bill that would vastly benefit charter schools at the expense of public school districts and local taxpayers, while failing to provide critical funding reforms and accountability measures for charter schools. We had been e-mailing our legislators expressing opposition to this bill the week before the conference, and our advocacy continued during the conference, with multiple phone calls and e-mails to our legislators. On Tuesday night, the Senate passed the bill, 33-16. While this was discouraging, we were very pleased to learn that our Senator, Randy Vulakovich, voted against the bill.

On Wednesday, the action shifted to the House. The lone PSBA lobbyist, who was battling valiantly against the bill, was vastly outnumbered by lobbyists from the charter and cyber schools and by representatives from the offices of Gov. Corbett and the Senate Republican leadership, who were pressuring the House Republicans to pass the bill. By mid-afternoon, the PSBA lobbyist informed us that the measure would be brought to the floor for a vote. Mrs. Grosheider and I decided to drive over

to the Capitol and try to meet with Mike Turzai. We did that, and Mike came off the House floor with Rep. Killion to meet with us. We suggested that they defer the bill until the new session next year. We focused our discussion with them on one of the most objectionable features of the bill, which is its failure to address the pension “double dip” and other inequities in the funding formula that are costing school districts and local taxpayers millions of dollars a year. Mike Turzai said that the bill would begin to address these issues by establishing a Funding Commission to study and report next spring. We pointed out that the Funding Commission would have 17 members, 9 of whom would be appointed by the Governor, giving him (and the pro-charter lobby) control of the recommendations. After Mr. Turzai and Mr. Killion returned to the House floor, more and more Republican legislators backed away from the bill. In the end, they did not have nearly enough votes to pass the measure, so it was not brought to the floor for a vote. PSBA said, “In spite of the enormous pressure exerted by charter school advocates, in the end it was the visits, calls and emails by you and hundreds of other school directors, administrators, parents and others that made the difference and caused SB 1115 to fail.”

It was reported in the Post Gazette on Monday that Pennsylvania has received applications for eight more cyber charter schools. We already have 16, one of the highest concentrations in the nation. Clearly, cyber education is very lucrative in Pennsylvania, since so many new for-profit schools are seeking to set up shop here. Unfortunately, much of the exorbitant profit they hope to rake in comes from public tax dollars because of the flawed funding formula that requires public school districts like NA to pay excessively high tuition rates to cyber schools.

Both the Senate and the House have now recessed and adjourned until after the November 6 election. The House and Senate will reconvene on November 13 and 14 respectively, but no bills will be voted on between then and the end of the legislative session on November 30. All bills that did not pass will have to be reintroduced as new bills in the 2013-14 session beginning in January.