

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Costing-Out Study Committee

Progress Report – May 2007

General Information:

1. Following a review of proposals submitted in response to an RFP, the Board contracted with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates in Denver in December.
2. The Board's Costing-Out Study Committee reviewed APA's proposal and the Board's expectations with the contractor in December. Central to these expectations are a need for the study to be independent and free from political influence and a need for the Board to be as open as possible with stakeholders and the public as the study progresses.
3. The Board contracted with EdStrat21, a Harrisburg-based education strategies and project management consulting firm for the services of its president, Dr. Robert Feir, to serve as the Board's project manager.
4. Some of the work is being done by APA subcontractors, and APA reports that they are on schedule and that their work is being managed as planned.
5. Our project manager spent two days this month meeting with APA staff in Denver and reports that the project seems to be on schedule without any significant problems.

Data:

APA has requested detailed and voluminous data on school district revenues, expenditures, students, personnel, programs, and both school and community contextual variables. Virtually all of the data have been gathered and transmitted to APA.

Study Approaches:

1. Successful Districts: APA now has the data needed to determine which districts will be defined as "successful" for this analysis and is working to establish a final list of these districts to begin analyzing their costs.
2. Professional Judgment: Our project manager has been coordinating an elaborate statewide process of nominating education practitioners to serve on professional judgment panels. We have received nominations from all the major education groups, along with a number of self-nominations and others from various advocacy groups. APA is reviewing lists of nominees to establish panels based upon a good balance of regional representation and district size. The panel meetings have been held in March and April with additional meetings scheduled for early May in Harrisburg, King of Prussia, and Pittsburgh. They include educators from all nine regions established for the study.
3. Evidence-Based: APA is developing a number of research-based school improvement scenarios generally thought to help students increase academic achievement. These will be turned into a web-based simulation in which about 100 Pennsylvanians (educators and others) will be asked to respond to each of the improvement approaches and the costs associated with them. This web-based activity will occur in June.
4. Cost Function: This econometric approach is just getting underway.
5. In addition to the four approaches included in the contract, APA will be conducting meetings with school board members, business representatives, and parents in the six regions in which professional judgment panels will not occur. These meetings will take place between late March and early May.

Meetings/Presentations:

1. The Board's committee and APA staff met with the Stakeholders Group on January 24. This was an opportunity to explain the study, hear issues and concerns from stakeholders, and elicit their help in nominating participants for the professional judgment panels.
2. Dr. Feir made a presentation to the board of the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools in State College on February 9.
3. Dr. Feir participated on a panel on school finance issues conducted by Good Schools Pennsylvania in Lancaster on February 22.
4. Dr. James Barker, chair of the Board's Costing-Out Study Committee, and Dr. Feir made a joint presentation to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association annual legislative meeting in Hershey on February 25.
5. Jim Buckheit and Dr. Feir gave a briefing to legislative staff on March 8.
6. Dr. Feir made a presentation to the Capital Area Intermediate Unit superintendents in Summerdale on March 14.
7. Dr. Feir made a presentation to the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials in Pittsburgh on March 15.
8. Karl Girton, Dr. Feir and Jim Buckheit served as members of discussion panels at public forums on school finance sponsored by Good Schools Pennsylvania.
9. The Board's committee met with APA staff on April 19 to receive an update on the progress of the study and learn about next steps. APA will present the interim report to the Board at the Board's study session on May 16.