

CLARION MANOR INTERMEDIATE UNIT 6

Route 322 East, Shippenville, PA 16254

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Honorable J. William Lincoln, Chairman
Subcommittee on Basic Education
House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Chairman and Members of the Committee, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on Basic Education to express my views and answer questions about the Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit System. The Committee is to be highly commended for traveling over the state seeking direct input from the intermediate units.

I, and my fellow Executive Directors, feel very confident that your interest will result in greater benefits to the education system of this great Commonwealth. Intermediate units are service oriented; we welcome study and assistance in improving services to school districts and school children.

Chairman Lincoln, I have studied the REPORT ON THE PENNSYLVANIA INTERMEDIATE UNIT SYSTEM prepared by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. It is an excellent report! The school districts served by Clarion Manor Intermediate Unit will be recipients of better services if the Report Recommendations are acted upon by the Legislature and State Board of Education. The statements of the committee of Intermediate Unit Executive Directors are also in the best interests of our school districts.

There are a few specific suggestions that I believe should be considered by the Subcommittee on Basic Education. These suggestions are offered with all due respect for the fine work of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

ROLE OF THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT

The intermediate units do and should vary in the types of services they provide to meet the varying needs of the differing school districts. Care needs to be exercised in defining a comprehensive role and stating limitations that will prevent variations to meet the needs of school districts.

A role definition should be of assistance in providing improved services to school districts in some intermediate units, but may curtail some excellent and unique services in other intermediate units. The process should involve a great amount of communication and evaluation of the present roles of intermediate units.

The concept of a regional educational service agency is now well enough accepted to stand much free discussion, evaluation and definition. (Until recently, there has been so much fear of the intermediate units as regional offices of the PDE or replacements of the authoratative County Superintendents Offices that open discussion was not comfortable.)

NAME OF THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT

"Intermediate unit" has no meaning except to the small percentage of the public that is involved in the administration of intermediate units. The public has a right to know what an "intermediate unit" is!

Many of the constituents and users of services know the name, but do not realize that "intermediate" means "between" the state and local school system. A common explanation is that it is a "regional education office".

Now that the fear of "Regional Offices" as arms of the PDE has lessened, consideration should be given to some such a meaningful name. There will be opposition because of the inconvenience involved in changing the names, but the public interest and need should be considered.

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT

Legislation is needed to provide the intermediate units methods of owning property, vehicles and equipment. The legislation should be carefully drafted to provide control by the school districts.

FACILITIES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

There is a continued need for classrooms, therapy rooms and consultation offices for handicapped children.

School districts provide facilities for only their own resident students. The intermediate units are able to rent rooms that are not needed by the districts --- too often rooms that are no longer desirable for district use.

Legislation is needed to permit (perhaps require) school districts the flexibility to provide added rooms for handicapped children from neighboring districts. Special reimbursement is needed.

NUMBER OF BOARD MEMBERS

Four of the seventeen school districts in Clarion Manor Intermediate Unit 6 feel they are not represented on the Intermediate Unit Board. If we had nine members, they would feel they had a responsibility to represent all the districts. With thirteen members, they feel more representative of only their own districts.

The number of board members should vary according to the number of school districts in the intermediate unit --- with local options. If an intermediate unit with twenty-two districts wanted a small operating board, they should have the option of one member serving every two districts.

Thirteen was a magic number in only one intermediate unit when the legislation was passed. The number should be reconsidered.

BUDGET APPROVAL PROCEDURE

Ample opportunity for local district control is essential and should be retained; however, school district directors do not need to vote twice (in local board meeting and in convention) on the same budget. It is very difficult to get school district board members to come to the convention to vote on a budget that they have already voted on.

SERVING THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Prior to the appointment of the Special Assistant for Intermediate Units, personnel in the Department of Education used the intermediate units for a great variety of extra duties. Demands upon the intermediate units are now very reasonable.

Some services expected by the PDE do require expenditures that distract from services to school districts. An excellent relationship has been developed between the PDE, the intermediate units, and the school districts so the expenditures in time, energy or funds are distributed rather equitably.

The establishment of the intermediate units as a part of the state system of education would be very helpful so as to permit the intermediate units access to the state WATS lines. This is needed!

SERVING OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF STATE GOVERNMENT

When the intermediate units are called upon to provide services to other departments of state government, there must be funding provided.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has expected all intermediate units to provide personnel and resources for the operation of Youth Traffic Safety Council and School Bus Driver Training Program. The intermediate unit is caught in the middle with a service that needs to be provided, but with no legal basis for the expenditures.

FINANCING THE INTERMEDIATE UNITS

The current system for state funding of intermediate units needs to be changed. There are unreasonable inequities that need to be corrected, and the amount of state funding needs to be increased in relation to the inflation of the past six years.

In theory, the districts contributions according the inverse of aid ratio seems equitable; however, it places the poorer districts at the mercy of the richer districts in the determination of services offered by the intermediate unit. Richer districts, with an overabundance of pride, will spend extra local funds to duplicate a service for their own use and resist supporting a service for the poorer districts.

LOCAL CONTROL


Local control is essential to maintain the service orientation of the intermediate units.

The Legislature must exercise great caution or attempts to correct problems in a few intermediate units may result in too much state control.

EVALUATION OF INTERMEDIATE UNITS

The study by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee and these hearings by the Subcommittee on Basic Education are wonderful! This needed to be done at this time. Another such major study should be conducted at the state level in about five more years.

Annually each intermediate unit reviews its program of services as a part of the program budget development. This provides a thorough evaluation of the past year's services. With the emphasis on local control the evaluation is adequate.



Edgar L. Lawton
Executive Director