

Legislative Report 12/8/11 “Stand Up for Public Education”

I would like to take a moment and thank my colleagues for your continued support as PSBA Legislative Liaison. I accept and enjoy the responsibility of providing a monthly update of what is happening in our state and nation’s capitals that directly impact what we do in the Kane Area School District.

As you know, taxpayer-funded vouchers remain a very critical issue. As I reported last month, SB 1 narrowly passed the Senate, and is currently in the House at the center of a storm.

Updated PSBA Focus Video to be posted on our website:

<http://www.psba.org/issues-advocacy/issues-research/psbafocus.asp>

Instead I would like to focus on a different but timely message. As Liaison, I usually try to provide a balanced clarification of the issues; I personally don’t like extreme, conspiratorial or gossip-y content. But I feel compelled to share an important point that all stakeholders in the KASD need to know: public education is under attack. If you take a look at newspapers, online news and blogs – many state and federal legislators strongly maintain that public education is failing, it is broken. They are looking to radically alter the way children experience education in our state and our country. While we know that we do have many challenges in public education that need to be collaboratively addressed, the current attack is being fueled by individuals and groups that seem to have two things in common: 1) they have a lot of money; 2) they have never worked inside of a classroom. Most talk a language of philanthropy, of student’s best interests, but so many of these people are simply looking at government education budgets as a new revenue source. There are numerous options on the legislative table that will cost taxpayers more, take resources away from the vast majority of students, and establish programs that have not a whit of research to justify them.

At the recent PSBA/PASA Leadership Conference, keynote speaker Jamie Vollmer acknowledged the unprecedented negative feelings towards public education – but conceptualized it as a time of hope and opportunity. And I feel that it could be – I believe that there are a lot of great things happening in our schools, and schools everywhere. But all of us in public education, we need to get our act together. We need to accurately and effectively communicate our message: we are doing a good job educating *every single child*, and we *are going* to get better. More on that message next month. Mr. Vollmer encourages a strategy called ‘The Conversation’. While he writes extensively about the components of this strategy, here’s what they boil down to:

<http://www.jamievollmer.com/the-conversation.html>

- 1) Shift attention from the negative to the positive – don’t focus all the time on what you don’t have or what broke down. Focus on what is working well, our strengths, and build up from there.

- 2) Stop bad-mouthing one another in public – in education, we all have a things we could complain about, but it is a self-destructive waste of time. And you are essentially shooting yourself in the foot if you contribute to the negative atmosphere threatening public education.
- 3) Share something positive within our social networks – [his words, because they are so great]
Even a casual reference regarding some small breakthrough at school made during a routine conversation is enough to make a positive impression. The recounting of a hopeful moment with a student carries an uplifting message of hope. As the process unfolds, and more staff members choose to add their stories, hundreds, if not thousands, of positive impulses begin to move across a web of overlapping social networks like ripples on a pond. Soon, with almost no effort, the entire community is enlivened with good news about their schools, and everyone is energized in the process.
- 4) Monitoring your progress – be aware of the positive statements you make, and make a conscious, purposeful effort to increase them weekly.

Thank you for your patience. You do send me to Conferences to use the information (☺), and I do feel strongly about this. Along with other entities, PSBA has started a movement: It is time to STAND UP for Public Education!!

<http://standupforpubliceducation.org/>