

Education an economic force

Beverly Engel, Monroe County Federation of Teachers; and Mary Williamson, Genesee Valley PTA



Bev Engel

Mary Williamson



In addition to being the major provider of exemplary prekindergarten to 12th-grade education services in our community, the 21-member districts represented by the Monroe County Education Coalition are the area's major employer and a major force that keeps our county's economic engine running smoothly.

Our school districts collectively educate approximately 118,000 young people each year as well as almost 63,000 adults. The programs they provide are widely recognized nationally for their excellence and innovation.

School districts involve not only professional educators but also support personnel who maintain buildings and grounds, prepare meals and transport students. Our districts employ 23,000 of our own citizens, who perform their jobs well and who spend their earnings here in our community, thus making them the largest consumer group in our region.

Our professional staff members, who are required to obtain advanced degrees and to continuously expand their own learning, participate in post-graduate programs offered by our area's large number of colleges and training providers.

In addition, to meet their educational obligations, our districts purchase supplies, equipment, utilities, food, and services from local vendors — and their major capital projects provide employment through local construction firms.

While providing all this economic and educational leadership, our public schools form the most open form of government, involving community members in developing goals and in determining spending levels.

Our districts also continually seek ways to be good stewards of the financial resources with which they've been entrusted. They have created many partnerships among themselves and with local businesses and other groups to deliver educational programs and services that are recognized nationally for their excellence while being as cost effective as possible.

Our districts also promote the high quality of life in our region with their student-based community-service projects as well as with programs for our community's senior citizens.

More information on the ways that our districts help to drive our economy while serving their communities is available in publications accessible from the Internet:

- "The Best for Less" (collaborations to provide programs cost effectively) – www.mcsba.org
- "Monroe County's Public Schools: An economic & educational force" – www.mcsba.org/mcec
- "Q & A: Monroe County's Public Schools" (on school district economic issues) – www.mcsba.org.

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Genesee Valley
PTA

Monroe County
Federation
of Teachers

NYSUT
(NYS United
Teachers)

Monroe County
Association
of School
Business Officials

Monroe County
Council of School
Superintendents

Monroe County
School Boards
Association

Rochester City
School District

School
Administrators
Association
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'Paperwork' reduction needed!

Judy Wadsworth, Assistant to Executive Director, Monroe County School Boards Association



Judy Wadsworth

One way that the state could support its schools during these trying economic times—at no cost to itself while saving local property tax payers money—would be to approve legislation to consolidate the number of reports that school districts are required to file annually. The current reporting requirements made of school districts are one example of unfunded mandates, imposed by state and federal government, that are bankrupting local governments.

School districts are forced by state and federal law to waste precious resources on the preparation of multiple, complex, and duplicative reports. The sheer volume of these reports – 150+ reports each from more than 700 districts every year—suggests that no one has time to read them so the information they provide in a duplicative fashion is never applied to existing problems.

And the completion of these reports involves an enormous time commitment by administrative staff whose expertise would be better spent on efforts more directly advantageous to students and learning. Money is a limited resource that districts seek to conserve and use for the most valuable ends. Time is an irreplaceable resource that is lost because of so many unneeded reports that do not assist in teaching or learning.

At the request of the NYS Legislature, the State Education Department (SED) in 2003 developed a proposal for reducing the number of mandated reports by consolidating the required information into fewer reports. This report recommends that all existing planning

and reporting requirements be replaced with a new comprehensive, streamlined system.

The SED proposal for change in reporting notes that **“current requirements do little to promote coordinated continuous school improvement, close the student achievement gap or assure the public that they are getting the most out of education resources.”**

And the same proposal states that, **“A streamlined comprehensive and coordinated system of school district planning and reporting should be established with full consideration of available technology, staff capacity, accountability systems, and strategic goals.”**

The NYS Senate has approved these recommended changes for several years but the Assembly has not allowed the topic to reach the floor for discussion. Several unrelated reasons have been given for this lack of attention, among them being a concern that schools will not comply with state rules if the reports are not left as currently configured, and SED managers fearing for their jobs if the reporting is streamlined.

We need to convince members of the NYS Assembly that the current reporting system is counter-productive, interfering with the ability of districts to accomplish their educational goals, and that they should join with their colleagues in the Senate and the SED leadership to support changes that would facilitate more efficient, effective, useful reporting.

Monroe County Education Coalition

.....Representing 60,000 Members
.....A force in our community

