

<http://www.buckscountycouriertimes.com/tncms/asset/editorial/187d6b12-8101-11e6-b47f-b70968f44091/>

Charter schools dominate talk at William Tennent roundtable

By Chris English, staff writer 15 hrs ago



Employee pension and charter school tuition costs are the two biggest financial challenges facing Pennsylvania public schools, two area school district superintendents said Thursday night during a Pennsylvania School Boards Association legislative roundtable at William Tennent High School in Warminster.

The event was a chance for school board members and administrators from Bucks, Montgomery and other counties to talk with state lawmakers and others about educational issues, said PSBA Executive Director Nathan Mains.

Discussion of charter schools dominated much of the night.

The Newest Technology in Fat & Inch Loss is Here.

LASER-LIKE LIPO FOR BODY CONTOURING

Doctor Supervised
No Down Time
All Natural - Safe & Effective
Free Initial Consultation*
Free Body Composition Analysis

CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT 215-862-6363

Wellness & Weight Loss 360, LLC
*Results may vary.
*Medicare regulations apply

Office location:
4814 York Road
Buckingham, PA

Bensalem Superintendent Samuel Lee said the school district must pay \$13,000 a year per regular education student and \$32,000 per special education student for the 752 students that attend School

Lane Charter Schools in Bensalem.

"That's far more than it would cost to educate those students in our schools," said Lee, who added that he was not criticizing the quality of education offered at School Lane but just pointing out fiscal realities.

"They have good programs and do a good job, but (charter school tuition costs) compromise our ability to provide that equity and excellence that we want for all our students," said Lee.

Frank Gallagher, superintendent of the Souderton School District in Bucks and Eastern Montgomery counties, had similar thoughts.

"Charter schools are not subject to the same fund balance and operating surplus rules as regular public schools," he said. "There is no oversight of the charter school budgeting process. The people who run the charter school in our district have good intentions, but I don't think the school is nearly as innovative as our schools in Souderton."

State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale, the keynote speaker at Thursday night's event, said state laws governing charter schools need a major overhaul.

"You have some charter schools getting lease payments for buildings they already own," he said. "You have one CEO of a cyber charter school who made so much money from it that he bought a jet airplane and didn't violate any state law doing it. Now whether you're an advocate of charter schools or skeptic of them, I think there is one thing we can agree on. When a charter school head buys an airplane and doesn't violate a state law, that is a problem.

"If I accomplish just one more thing as auditor general, it would be to fix the charter school law," DePasquale added. "I'm going to stay on it."

State and federal mandated testing of students was another subject that came up Thursday night.

"State testing is very expensive and time consuming," wrote Centennial School District Superintendent David Baugh in a letter read by school board president Charles Kleinschmidt because Baugh couldn't attend the event.

"I request that state legislators stop supporting a state testing accountability system that is broken," Baugh continued in the letter. "The testing system needs to be fundamentally redesigned."

Kleinschmidt urged school board members, administrators and other officials to work closely with their state lawmakers to make education better for students across the state.

"This is a critical time for local school boards as they continue to struggle with unfunded mandates from Washington, D.C., and their state capitals," he said.

The overall goal, said Mains, is to "make sure every child has the best possible education in every school district."

Enjoying this series? [Become an Intelligencer subscriber](#) to support stories like these. Get full access to our signature journalism for just 33 cents a day.

Chris English: 215-949-4193; email: cenglish@calkins.com; Twitter: [@courierc](https://twitter.com/courierc)

Chris English