

State of AESA 2008

Before I begin my address I want to introduce my friend and Associate Ruud Gorter, Professor and Director of EDventure at Holland University in the Netherlands. Ruud welcome, we always appreciate the opportunities for our Associations to work together.

I can report to you that AESA is strong and vibrant. As a virtual association AESA is in the forefront of leadership and recognized for being proactive with our members. We use technology effectively to communicate amongst staff, council and our members. With our Business Partner Comotiv we now have our Council and many of our committee members connected electronically.

Speaking of our committees, I want to review some of their work:

Governmental Relations Committee

Our Governmental Relations Committee continues to expand its effectiveness by advocating for the inclusion of ESAs in all major pieces of federal legislation. Your work on the AESA Federal Legislative Agenda with congressional delegations in your home districts and in Washington, DC has yielded great results. I am impressed with how well informed congressional staff members are regarding ESAs.

It has not always been this way and the change came through your hard work. Please keep up this effort, especially with our new members of Congress.

This was a year where there was not a lot of education legislation; however, we scored several major victories. First, ESAs were written into the Higher Education Act as potential partners eligible for federal funding. This will have a direct impact on professional development and alternative certification programs. The second victory came when we were able to include language in the Higher Education Act that expanded the ESEA funding for federal loan forgiveness for LEA teachers in Title I schools to provide ESA teachers the same loan forgiveness benefit. I am already hearing that this piece of legislation has enhanced the ability for ESAs to attract and recruit regular education teachers and special needs teachers to work within these qualifying districts that they serve. While many people across the country worked on correcting this inequity, I want to give special thanks to the efforts of the Michigan ISDs and New York BOCES and

especially to Roberta Stanley in the Michigan Department of Education and Cynthia Woodside in the New York State Department of Education. ESAs were also leaders in the nationwide effort to successfully extend Medicaid reimbursement for transportation funds. This is only a temporary fix, and we will be back on the Hill seeking permanent legislation for Medicaid reimbursement. Another success that took continued effort was the extension of the Federal Forest Lands funding, which is tremendously important to rural and small schools in many western states. I also want to thank Bruce Hunter, Mary Kusler and Noelle Ellerson who represent us on the Hill every day.

As we learned from Bruce Hunter in his breakout session this morning, there are a lot of changes going on in Washington, DC and a lot of work to do on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Membership Services Committee

Our Membership Services Committee continues to reach out to our membership. The first-timers breakfasts yesterday and regional breakfasts this morning were all part of their effort to serve you. Tomorrow afternoon they are supporting the roundtable discussions. The Membership Services Committee continues to expand our Executives in Residence Program. A special thanks to our Chair Twyla Barnes who you heard from a few minutes ago and our Vice Chair Ron Hitchcock for all the time they take to support our Executives in Residence.

Research and Development Committee

The Research and Development Committee has multiple activities going on at this time. Tomorrow at lunch you will hear from Ted Stilwill about the research that Learning Point Associates is doing on our Voluntary Accreditation/Accountability Standards. Learning Point Associates have done an exceptional job on this study and I am anxious to hear from Ted regarding their findings. A major thank you to the AESA Foundation for providing over \$50,000 to fund this important work.

Walden University funded an important study on Alternative Certification and there will be a roundtable session tomorrow at 2:45 conducted by McREL who did the research for us. Walden University also funded a study to identify the online needs of ESAs and the districts they serve. This report will also be shared during a roundtable discussion. Speaking of research I want to take a moment to thank Dr. Bill Keane, the Editorial

Board and the contributing writers for all the work they put into Perspectives, a Journal of Research and Opinion about Educational Service Agencies. Our journal is critical to our future growth and I urge everyone doing research to submit his or her research to Bill Keane.

Business Relations Committee

The Business Relations Committee is very active as we continue to expand and nurture our business members, sponsors and partners. It is because of these business members, partners and sponsors that AESA is able to provide the quality and diversity of services to our membership. The economic issues we currently face have caused some companies to reconsider how and with whom they interact. Conversely, there are other companies that understand that increased demand for ESA services from local school districts often increase during times of economic hardship. It is these companies that increase their commitments to AESA. We are seeing those companies coming to AESA to become Business Members and at the same time many current Business Members and Business Partners exploring avenues to increase their participation. I encourage each of you to spend time with our exhibitors and learn about how their products can help your ESA and the districts you serve.

I also ask that each agency, regardless of its size, examine its vendor relationships, and for you to encourage the top two or three companies you work with to become an AESA Business Member, or if they already participate with the association, to thank them for their national relationship.

I want to personally thank our exhibitors, business members and sponsors. Our conference sponsors include:

AEPA, Comotiv Systems, Direct Energy, Great American Financial Resources, Grace Global Corporation, McGraw Hill Education, Nova Southeastern University, PEPPM, Promethean, TCG Advisors, Walden University, and Williams Scotsman.

We also want to welcome our newest Business Partner, Promethean, and recognize both Computer Automation Systems and Nova Southeastern University, which have started discussions to move from being Business Members to become AESA Business Partners.

Global Education Ad Hoc Committee

Our new Global Education Ad Hoc Committee has been established to explore the development of AESA's relationship with International

counterparts. This is an exciting new initiative that is being led by Mike Cook and Vickie Markavitch.

Two other AESA partnerships that are extremely important include the National Association of Media and Technology Center (NAMTC) and the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies (AEPA). I want to thank NAMTC for holding their annual meeting and Leadership Summit in conjunction with AESA. NAMTC also helped us by providing quality technology breakout sessions during this conference. This is an outstanding organization and I would urge each ESA to encourage their technology people to join our sister organization NAMTC.

This year AESA entered into an alliance with Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies (AEPA). AESA encourages participation in AEPA and will work with states that want to participate in cooperative purchasing. AESA President-elect, Joe Crozier and I will serve as ex-officio members on the AEPA Board.

I also want to share a special goal of President Witten's, which is to explore professional development opportunities at the annual conference for ESA staff members, such as Special Education Directors, Curriculum Directors, Public Relations Directors, and Human Resources Directors. To this end at 2:45 tomorrow there will be roundtable discussions for all of these areas of expertise. This is an important step for AESA as we start looking at ways to meet the needs of our staffs either through job alikees or through partnerships or alliances with other organizations like NAMTC and AEPA.

I now want to change direction and talk about visioning and positioning of ESAs. Yes, the economy is not where we want it to be and yes, we will be facing budget cuts, but remember ESAs have always flourished in tough economic times. Historically during these tough times we have had the most program growth. I am already hearing from some of you that while facing cuts in some areas the local school districts are looking for ways to cut costs and are looking at expanding or building cooperative ESA services to meet those needs. So don't take your eyes off the ball, because if you do someone will step in to fill the void or, in the worst case, schools and students won't have the services they need.

Another area I want to talk about is online learning. As many of you know I have been involved in distance education in one way or another since the

1980's. I have watched this area grow and expand and I feel due to the current economic conditions that we have reached the tipping point for online learning. The question for ESAs is what will your role be as it relates to online learning. Online learning is playing an expanded role in K-12 education as well as in higher education. I live in a rural part of the State of Washington where a K-8 school district with an enrollment of just over 250 students offers K-12 online education to students throughout the Pacific Northwest. In Florida the Orlando Sentinel on November 12, 2008 writes "thousands of Florida students may ditch public elementary and middle schools next year in favor of online classes at home...an option that could change the face of public education. A new law that takes effect next fall requires every district in the state to set up an online school for kindergarten through eighth grade students. They won't have to get on the bus or even get out of their PJs ... to head to school at the family computer".

So yes, education is changing. The question for ESAs is what will your role be and how will you work with ESA providers and other public/private online learning providers. What role will you play in your region as it relates to students and community members? I see a lot of opportunities. For example in Washington and Oregon a partnership with Nova Southeastern University is providing speech and hearing pathologists through online learning.

This coalition will address a severe need in the Pacific Northwest. So as an ESA will you stand on the sideline and watch or will you become the hub and broker of online learning for the districts you serve? Will you provide mentors and cohorts to support the learners?

Oh, by the way did I forget to mention that in Florida, the state is paying the school district \$6,000 for every online student?

If you don't think we've reached the tipping point then go to the exhibit hall and visit the following online providers and talk to them about what online courses are available. Visit American Public University System, Grand Canyon University, Jefferson County Educational Service Center, Nova Southeastern University, Virtual High School, Virtual Learning Academy, Walden University, and Western Governors University.

So remember keep your eyes on the ball, stay flexible and seize the opportunities that will strengthen your ESAs and in turn ESAs across the country.

On behalf of AESA, thank you for all you do for school districts, schools and students.

Brian Talbott
Executive Director
Association of Educational Service Agencies