



West Virginia Chamber Responds to Remarks from Board of Education President Paul Hardesty

By: Steve Roberts

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Well-educated students who are prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st Century are vital to our success as a state. Today's students will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed in life if they are properly educated and prepared.

Yesterday, West Virginia Board of Education President Paul Hardesty pointed to important facts regarding the West Virginia school-age population and regulations regarding school funding. Mr. Hardesty correctly points out that in order to improve public education, legislators must remove regulations put in place by their predecessors that hamper student success. Only legislators can remove the shackles contained in 1,300 pages of rules and regulations that hold back public education in West Virginia.

Those laws have not been substantially updated to allow for the needs of our 21st Century students and teachers. We agree with Mr. Hardesty that school choice is desirable. We also agree with Mr. Hardesty that school choice comes with a cost.

It is projected that non-public K-12 education will soon cost West Virginia taxpayers an estimated \$300 million a year. It is not only the responsibility, but the duty of West Virginia officials to point out this cost. We agree that school choice is important. We also support those who anticipate that there may be needed reforms due to population loss and added costs associated with providing taxpayer money for non-public, non-traditional school education.

Currently, nearly 95% of West Virginia's students attend public schools. It is the responsibility of the West Virginia Board of Education to provide the best possible education for these students and to show care and concern for all students, public and private.

Reforms to West Virginia's education laws are necessary to keep up with changing times. We applaud those who are pointing out that West Virginia's falling public school population requires attention. Fixing West Virginia's laws governing public education is in everyone's best interests. Paul Hardesty spoke up and took on a challenging subject. We applaud him for doing so.