Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 24 June 2008 19:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 June 2008 14:29

For 15 years, the Farm Bureaus of Washington, Harrison, and Crawford counties have met in June to discuss a topic regarding modern public education with education officials from the three counties.

This year's meeting was held Wednesday (June 18) at the Central Barren United Methodist Church, and the topic was regarding the recent changes the Indiana Legislature has made regarding school funding. Although the amount of monies the various school districts will get is probably not going to change much from recent years, beginning on January 1, 2009, the State of Indiana will begin funding every school district's General Fund.

Among the school officials present at the meeting, the exact changes to occur after the funding change are still up in the air.

North Harrison Supt. Dr. Phil Partenheimer said he thought it would mean open enrollment in the schools, since the schools would no longer need to charge tuition when an out of district student enrolls.

Because the state was going to fund each school's General Fund, Dr. Partenheimer argued that now more than ever, public education was going to be tied to the state of the economy.

Dr. Partenheimer said that it might be a wise thing for the state to keep its Reserve Fund, which was discontinued in 2001, when the money was refunded back to the taxpayers, "in case of a downturn in the economy."

With regards to the open enrollment, Dr. Partenheimer thought that the situation would put more pressure on schools to maintain a focus on student achievement.

Dr. Partenheimer said that the concept of open enrollment would only apply to a student not having to pay tuition to attend a school where he or she didn't live in the district. The student would have to be driven to the school they would be transferring to, or if the student is of driving age, they would of course have the option of driving themselves. Dr. Partenheimer thought it would make a big impact if the student was closer to a school outside their district, than the one they attend.

Lanesville Supt. Sam Gardner has been the interim superintendent at Lanesville since the middle of 2007, and said, "It's been a wonderful experience to work in Lanesville."

Gardner called the change in funding and the recent reassessments "not a tax decrease, a tax shift. Some people are paying more, some people are paying less."

Noting that a recent commission in the state called for the consolidation of government bodies, including school corporations, to trim costs everywhere, Gardner said he understands the fear some people have regarding the matter.

"The fear has always been, if we go to a larger (school) system, you're going to close my school," said Gardner, who said that smaller schools have good quality education.

South Harrison board member Carolyn Wallace said that "there are still many, many questions that are unanswered" with regards to the state now funding a school's General Fund.