

# Historical remarks from the celebration

Good evening school leaders and valued guests. It is a pleasure to be with you this evening as we celebrate the proud 75 year history of this great Association. It was nearly a year and a half ago when it was noted that the published brief history of the organization listed the year 1948 as being the beginning. A quick iPhone calculation later it was realized that we were indeed on the cusp of our 75th year. Under Gary's leadership the staff was activated to plan a multi-event celebration culminating tonight.

After reviewing 75 years worth of Board minutes, I've been asked to give the "Cliffiest of Cliff Notes" history of the Association. So here goes....

Prior to 1947, the Private School Teachers Association of Philadelphia and Vicinity were holding regular get-togethers, including annual meetings. In December of 1947, bolstered by State Act No 401 allowing independent school accreditation in lieu of licensure, visionary leaders decided to form the Association of Elementary Schools of Pennsylvania. This will be a group solely to accredit elementary schools and membership dues are set at \$50 per year. (that's about \$645 in today's dollars)

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Association of Elementary Schools of Pennsylvania on January 9th, 1948, it was decided that the group should rename itself the Pennsylvania Association of Private and Academic Schools (PAPAS). At this point, the Association was composed of schools with Nursery, Kindergarten and Elementary programs, with some stretching to include 9th and 10th grade if they were connected. By March of 1948 the State had acknowledged, for one year, the right of PAPAS to accredit elementary schools in Pennsylvania.

From the PAPAS Board minutes of that spring, "Miss Tilley reported that a group of five schools had met in Pittsburgh to form the Western Pennsylvania branch of the Association. These schools are: Sewickley Academy, Shady Side Academy, Falk Laboratory School, Winchester Thurston School and The Ellis School." Thus PAPAS, as an approximately 58 member state-wide Association, is born.

What is important to note is that at the onset, this was an Association that only accredited elementary schools. The Board minutes do not discuss expanding accreditation until 1977 when adapting some of the criterion to include standalone Middle Schools was addressed. And then in 1978 concerns were expressed that the state now had 28 schools that contained a high school division and thus needed to undergo two different accreditation processes, which was costly and contained several redundancies. It wasn't until October, 1984, that Springside School became the first high school accredited by PAPAS.

But the work that PAPAS did, and the credibility that it had almost from its earliest time, is memorialized by the fact that PAPAS was asked to provide accreditation committees or at least the leadership of committees, utilizing the PAPAS instrument, to evaluate schools in: Long Island, North Carolina, DC, Louisiana, Rhode Island, and Delaware. And remarkably, in 1966, PAPAS was invited and then provided leadership of a committee evaluating the St. John's School in Santurce, Puerto Rico. Any volunteers for that duty next winter??

In 1961 the Pennsylvania Council of Independent Schools (PCIS) is born, eventually becoming PAIS. Linda Phelps began her remarkable service to Pennsylvania independent schools by becoming the Executive Director of both Associations, PAIS and PAPAS, in 1992.

Talks of PAPAS/PAIS sharing office space began in 1968. Conversations continued for several years with a recurring question as to whether a partnership might jeopardize PAPAS's accreditation relationship with the state. That partnership was solidified with some crossover Board members, and then in 1990 talks of the two groups merging began. Interestingly, I found in the PAIS minutes of April, 1975, a reference to the PAIS/PAPAS merger conversation. "The Vice President of the PAPAS Board had qualms about this proposal, because they viewed it as a takeover by PAIS and they feared it would injure PAPAS's Charter to evaluate". In 2000, PAIS/PAPAS moved from a longtime home on the campus of Baldwin School to its own rented office space. The merger of the two groups, under the name of PAIS, was finally completed in 2006, with then PAIS Board member Gary Niels being one of the signatories.

Items that made their way into several PAIS meeting discussions were: laws surrounding asbestos removal, passenger van capacity, the 180-day exemption, school choice, and of course the possibility of PAIS and PAPAS merging. An interesting note from the 1990 minutes - A student was expelled from a member school and the family took the school to court and won. PAIS contracted a lawyer to submit a brief as this decision was seen as a huge infringement on independent school rights and therefore potentially impactful to member schools.

In 2011 PAIS was approached by two Delaware Schools seeking accreditation. Thirteen years later PAIS has three Delaware member/accredited schools and is seeking ways to grow that number.

As I read through the minutes, I was fascinated by what challenged accreditors over the 75 year history. Under the heading, 'everything old is new again', it might give us all some consolation (or indigestion) to know that all the way back in 1952 the most common concerns, known at that time as "the summary of deficiencies", found at schools being accredited were

- Inadequacy of salary schedule
- Fire/Safety Hazard
- Deficiencies in qualifications for staff members
- Deficient in amount of time allotted to administrative supervision
- Excessive teacher load
- Poor teacher-pupil ratio

Here is a happy note I uncovered....it was in 1979 that PAPAS officially discontinued the process of rating individual teachers...think about how that would play today!

## Food

One look at the abundant food that Milton Hershey has blessed us with tonight is a nice follow through on what I found in the early minutes of the Association. As I reviewed the minutes, it seemed like every single early meeting had a minutes entry that read something like this:

- "The Committee then adjourned to a dinner outstanding even by PAPAS standards..."
- "Following the report the committee adjourned to a delicious steak dinner for which no formal thanks were given but many informal words of appreciation expressed"
- "The Board members were treated to a specially delicious lunch featuring homemade Maryland crab soup, which brought most members back for seconds"

We began preparing for this celebration with a real desire to make it a look into the future, the next 75 years of PAIS. So perhaps tonight marks the formal end of our look back. As I wrap up my remarks I have the past in mind, a past that built the foundation for our present and has given us the strength and wherewithal to look boldly into the future. At several of my speeches at my previous employer, the 180 year old Wyoming Seminary, I would invoke the maxim "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants" to best express how the school and perhaps I had gotten to where we were at that moment. Sir Isaac Newtown is credited with saying "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

PAIS is where it is tonight because all of us assembled here have stood upon and continue to stand upon the shoulders of our own giants.

- The members of the Pennsylvania Department of Education who had the wisdom to empower independent schools to monitor their own health and progress through accreditation.
- School leaders who had the vision to start and maintain excellent Pennsylvania independent schools for over three centuries and who had the courage 75 years ago to create PAPAS and take on an accreditation process for those schools in 1948.
- The keepers of 75 years of records who have left a valuable treasure trove of information for us.
- Many of those same school leaders who realized that effective independent school advocacy in Harrisburg was needed and therefore created PCIS in 1961, and the leadership of both groups that saw value and economy in merging PAPAS and PAIS together in 2006.
- Individual shoulders like those of Linda Phelps and Gary Niels who have been outstanding stewards of the ideals and the Mission throughout 32 of the 75 years of the Association. And of course so, so many others too numerous to name but equally responsible for every step that led to tonight. Some are sitting in this space right now.

We move forward with great enthusiasm to continue the work of those visionary giants who preceded us. Here's to the future of this great Association.

Remarks presented by:

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