

Board of Education Backs Ag Ed

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issued by those reviewing agencies.

Also, there are 171 school districts across the state that have already entered into strategic planning for next year's courses. They need the regulations with which they intend to comply.

The need for including agriculture and agricultural sciences in curriculum has become apparent for many people, because the number of students and adults without any basic agricultural experience or knowledge has grown so great in recent years.

The board approved amending Chapters 3, 5 and 6 of its regulations, but changes to Chapter 5 directly affect agricultural education. Chapter 5 deals with curriculum.

The gist of the amendments to Chapter 5 is to make sure each student receives at least a minimal agricultural education.

On Wednesday, the Commission on Basic Education, an agency of the State Board of Education, met and adopted the amendments which were then forwarded to the full board for consideration Thursday.

The amendments were supported in recent weeks by verbal and written recommendations from the Senate and House agricultural and education committees, and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC).

In order for the regulatory amendments to be put into effect, the House and Senate education committees have 20 days for review and approval and the IRRC has 30 days.

In light of the support already given to the revisions, it is likely that they will be approved for publication in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, which would then make them legal.

Specifically, the proposed Chapter 5 amendments would add language to the entry of science as a required topic of study for the intermediate students. Intermediate students are those in grades 4, 5, and 6.

The portion of Chapter 5 dealing with intermediate students requires that eight different subjects which school district must incorporate into their scheduled courses.

Section f under elementary education, states, "Planned courses that provide instruction in the following areas shall be taught to every student every year in the intermediate level program. These planned courses may be taught as separate courses or may be integrated into other appropriate

planned courses."

The change proposed here is to add behind the topic "Science" the words, "including where appropriate instruction about agriculture and agricultural science."

At the middle school level, the proposed wording would be, "Science, which involves active learning experiences and which may include laboratory experiments and where appropriate information about agriculture and agricultural science."

Under high school education, the segment concerning science has been expanded to read, "Science, including participation in hands-on experiments and at least one laboratory science chose from life sciences, earth and space sciences, chemical sciences, physical sciences and agricultural sciences."

Other proposed changes to the regulations deal with the establishment of occupational advisory committees, the protection of stu-

dent anonymity during state and school district assessments of its teaching programs, ensuring parents' rights to have children excused from programs which conflict with their religious beliefs and excused from participating in state assessments, upon receipt by the school district of a written request from the parents.

Robert Lauffer, president of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Teachers Association (PVATA), one of the main lobbying groups for the agricultural changes, said that the proposed changes are welcome and protect the local school district to make choices on courses.

"That kicks it back to the local district and that's where it should be. It should be a local discretionary decision where agriculture can be considered and the school board can decide" how to fulfill the regulatory outlines, he said.

Lauffer, in previous testimony before the Board of Education, had said that the reason agriculture should be included in the regulations, was so that school districts had a choice to use agricultural sciences and incorporate agriculture.

He compared it to going into a restaurant and attempting to order something not specifically offered on the menu.

"Now we are on the menu," he said.

Further, Lauffer said his experiences in attempting to get reasonable change accomplished has been rewarding and educational.

"I am convinced that the system does work," he said, "the process does work as long as what you're advocating does make sense and you are persistent. We were able to have a big impact."

"I told the board today that agriculture and agricultural sciences have now been properly positioned in the curriculum in the overall heading of science."

"Now it becomes the opportunity and challenge for local districts to determine the whole process for addressing agriculture and incorporating it into existing programs."

The apparent next hurdle for the education board will be to address regulations of proposed "learning outcomes," which ostensibly will replace the old system of teach-test-and grade.

Rep. Stairs Proposes Mandatory Ag Education

VERNON ACHENBACH JR.
Lancaster Farming Staff
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Agriculturalists may eventually get the appreciative and educated consumers and neighbors they appear to have lost, if legislation proposed this week goes into effect.

Rep. Jess Stairs, R-Acme, Wednesday introduced legislation into the state House of Representatives that would create the Agricultural Education Act.

The proposal would require the Pennsylvania Department of Edu-

cation (PDE) to develop and implement agricultural education programs for the general student population, encourage ag education efforts by other groups, and create an agricultural education advisory council to the PDE.

According to Rep. Stairs, the proposal is bipartisan and he already has the support of at least 15 other representatives, of both parties.

Efforts by the Pennsylvania Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association (PVATA) and others to convince the state Board of Edu-

cation to include agricultural studies into the mainstream curricula resulted in some board action this week which would seem to fit well with the Agriculture Education Act.

The State Board of Education, under the PDE, creates regulations for school districts across the state, outlining minimum requirements for academic achievements.

This year, amidst a radically overhauled set of regulations, most reference to agriculture had been dropped, until Thursday.

Stairs said his proposal results from having talked to people who had been active in attempting to gain the understanding of the Board of Education.

"I had talked to a couple of people in the Pa. Farmers Association

and the vocational agriculture teachers and I guess the feeling was there is a need to educate non-farmers about (agriculture).

"We have, over the years, taken it for granted that people are well versed in production agriculture and with the large nonfarming population, a lot of people are unfortunately unaware of agriculture," Stairs said.

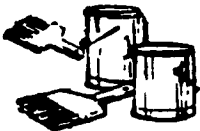
He said that the fact that many people only know that food comes from a grocery store is disappointing, and perhaps a failure of the educational system, which for years took for granted that students understood agriculture.

According to supporters of the legislation, that old assumption may have been an appropriate atti-

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