

State education leader visits East Porter County schools

Carmen McCollum

Jan 23, 2015



Indiana State Education Superintendent Glenda Ritz fields questions in Jeff Swisher's class at Kouts High School.

John J. Watkins, The Times

Carmen McCollum

KOUTS | Kouts High School juniors and seniors put Indiana's education leader on the hot seat Friday when they quizzed her on a number of issues in education including education funding, testing problems and technology in the classroom.

State education leader Glenda Ritz visited Jeff Swisher's class on "Current Topics" Friday and fielded about a dozen questions.

In response to a question on the many testing problems and issues in 2013, Ritz told students the testing company, CTB/McGraw-Hill, had computer disruptions during the 2013 statewide ISTEP-Plus exam. She said those problems have been resolved and the company is moving forward with developing a new exam in line with Indiana's new state standards.

Ritz explained to the students that every other year the Indiana General Assembly puts together a budget. This is a budget year, so the legislature will be meeting for a longer period of time. She said schools in Indiana used to be funded through property taxes, but a few years ago, the state took over that responsibility.

"The legislature uses a complicated formula to figure out how much each school district will receive and that money information is sent to the Indiana Department of Education which disburses the money," she said.

She said some high-performing school districts like the East Porter County School Corp., where Kouts Middle/High School is located, want to see more money in the school funding formula. Swisher sent the questions to Ritz in advance so she had some time to formulate her responses.

Students also asked Ritz if she expected to see a program where students could bring their own devices to school, using their own cellphones or iPads, and she said many districts are already doing that. The state does not supply technology for districts to use.

"We do supply funding that can be used in various ways. It's a local decision for your school board or administration to decide," Ritz said.

Rog Gardin, East Porter School Superintendent Rod Gardin, added the district will launch a program in the fall where students in grades 9-12 will each get a Chromebook.

"How many of you are seniors in here? Sorry you're going to miss out on it," Gardin said, drawing laughter from the students.

"Starting next school year, we have 850 Chromebooks. Over the last year or two, we have put in wireless access points. We have been building our network. There will be lots of bandwidth," he said, adding the money from that comes from the Capital Projects Fund and the Common School Fund Loan.