



ESA Member Spotlight

Hal Dunsavage, Superintendent
Somerset County Educational Services Commission
Bridgewater, New Jersey.

Turning Ideas from the Annual Conference into Enhanced Services Back at Home

A trip to the AESA National Conference is about both sharing and receiving information. Hal Dunsavage, the Superintendent of Somerset County Educational Services Commission in Bridgewater, New Jersey, has seen both sides of the equation.

Last year's conference in San Antonio, Texas, was Dunsavage's first. While there, he learned some techniques that his district implemented this year. He also offered information he hopes to expand upon during a presentation at this year's conference Nov. 28 to Dec. 1 in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In New Jersey, service agencies do not receive money from the state.

"We have the same expenses and responsibility to raise reserves" as school districts, Dunsavage said, but without any state aid. "We only raise money through tuition and the services we provide, so we have to provide better service at a fair price to make money. We have to be good at what we do."

These services include a range of transportation services, special education, career training, speech services, crisis intervention and life skills, to name a few. None of these services are cheap, which is why Dunsavage and his district have been forced to innovate. One of the most successful innovations has been a partnership with ShopRite Supermarkets to create a fully functioning store on school grounds. The store delivers groceries and sells to the school community while training students from new employees all the way to management.

"It's a great opportunity for students to gain employment," Dunsavage said.

The ShopRite store joins with the career center's small engine repair shop and graphic arts shop to give students several ready-made careers heading out of high school.

Last year, Dunsavage attended his first AESA conference hoping to share ideas. He took away several that he has implemented this year, including one plan that replaced traditional classroom furniture with less formal, more comfortable furniture. He tried it in four classrooms last year and the results – students who were more on target and focused to learn – that he plans to convert all classrooms to an informal setting in the next several years.

After last year's conference, Dunsavage also took a look at the best way to handle counseling for students, more of whom are dealing with issues like drug addiction and depression. He is working on a partnership with a local hospital to provide a psychiatrist to work with students and a psychologist to augment the staff so mental counseling can be removed from traditional counselor's caseloads.

"We have to change with the times," he said.

Dunsavage will be leading an hour-long presentation on Saturday at 9 a.m. during the conference on how ESAs can generate revenue. The presentation, *Throwing it Against the Wall to See What Sticks*, is part of the entrepreneurial strand.

"Almost every district faces a decline in enrollment and a decline in revenue, so we will talk about how we became successful," he said, including not only the district's partnerships with businesses but also how the \$8 million career center was built with bonds backed by the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, or county commission.

If you are planning your sessions for AESA's Annual Conference, check-out the AESA website where all the sessions are now listed, or download the mobile App, also now available.