

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on January 16, 2007, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Ashley Holm, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Sharon Wenger, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Jim Edwards, Kansas Association of School Boards
Dale Dennis, Interim Commissioner of Education

Jim Edwards, Kansas Association of School Boards, requested the introduction of a bill which would give school boards the authority to pay individuals before the statutory date of September. (Attachment 1) He commented that, because many schools start much earlier than September, it seemed unreasonable that individuals who begin working in August would not receive their first paycheck until the latter part of September under current law.

Senator Steineger moved to introduce the bill, seconded by Senator Teichman. The motion carried.

Dale Dennis, Interim Commissioner of Education, requested the introduction of two bills which would provide that members of the State Board of Education be treated the same as legislators with regard to campaign finance and governmental ethics.

Senator Teichman moved to introduce the bills, seconded by Senator Vratil. The motion carried.

Senator Vratil requested the introduction of the three bills. The first bill concerned high-density at-risk weighting. He explained that the bill would substitute a "linear transition" for the current "step approach." The second bill concerned juvenile detention facilities. He explained that new Medicaid regulations have affected the ability of juvenile detention facilities to get Medicaid funding. Under the proposed bill, juvenile detention facilities would be able to continue to get federal funding because all of them would be treated as psychiatric residential treatment facilities, which would qualify them for Medicaid funding. The third bill would simplify the local option budget statutory language. He noted that the bill would retain the provision which allows school districts to avail themselves of the averaging approach in order to increase their local option budget.

Senator Vratil moved to introduce the three bills he outlined, seconded by Senator Apple. The motion carried.

Mr. Dennis distributed a handout with pictures of the 2007 Kansas Teacher of the Year and the 2007 Kansas Regional Teachers of the Year. (Attachment 2) After briefly discussing the Kansas Teacher of the Year Program, he announced that the 2007 Kansas Teacher of the Year, Joshua Anderson, is one of four finalists for National Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Anderson informed the Committee that he teaches speech, debate, and American literature at Olathe Northwest High School. He noted that, although Kansas ranks in the bottom ten states for teacher salaries, it ranks in the top ten states for student achievement on state and national standardized tests. He went on to say that the passage of the three-year school finance plan in 2006 was exactly what was needed for Kansas to catch up with other states. He commented that Kansas students and their teachers have risen to the challenge of high expectations and outstanding achievements. He added, "No longer can we believe that reading, writing, and arithmetic are the only tools a child needs to be prepared for his or her future. They need technology to manage complex information. They need teachers who are prepared to respond to data, and they need communities who foster partnerships between schools and local industries." He noted that, in order to give Kansas students a competitive edge in a global marketplace, continued investment in classroom resources was very necessary because, without these resources, schools could offer only the promise of basic skills for a basic education.

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Lori Atkins Goodson, explained that she had chosen education as a second career, and she was in her eighth year of teaching language arts at Wamego Middle School. She noted that the combined efforts of the Legislature, communities, and educators have made a difference in the quality of education for Kansas students. She observed, "Money spent for one teacher, carries through to many others." For example, because of her professional development opportunities, she was able to create a fluency project to help the struggling readers in her classes. The regular curriculum approaches had not worked for these students for several years. They needed something new, and it worked. She shared her approach through another professional development opportunity, and it is now being used in several classrooms across the state.

Sheryl L. Smith, a visual arts teacher at Buhler High School, noted that schools continue to focus on reading, writing, and math, and she expressed her concern about opportunities for children who see the world in a different way and express themselves through visual or musical means. She commented, "When we seek to leave no child left behind academically, we are in danger of leaving all of our children behind culturally." She went on to say, "Why teach the arts? The arts address an additional three Rs – responsibility, respect, and results – all essential life skills. The arts engage our students and create enthusiasm for learning." She explained that students in her classroom volunteer to work with functional level students to create art experiences. One of her students currently is seriously considering pursuing a career in special education after working with a functional level student. In conclusion, she said, "The arts have provided motivation for students to stay in school and become active learners. The arts offer opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the regular education classroom. Depriving children of a well-rounded education, particularly those who struggle academically, is akin to malpractice."

Carrie Mugridge, a third grade teacher at Prairie Ridge Elementary School, said she was in her seventh year of teaching, and she is very proud of her profession. She noted that she currently has 21 students in her classroom, the smallest class she has ever had. Her class includes four special education students, three gifted program students, two students on behavior plans, and one student with autism. She has a resource teacher, but due to her caseload, she can only be in her classroom for 45 minutes to one hour per day. Therefore, every lesson that she plans must be differentiated to meet the needs of the varied learning styles in her classroom. She commented, "Due to the dedication of the professionals in my building, we have achieved the standard of excellence for the past two years in both reading and math. How can you help to ensure that our children continue to make these achievements? By keeping classroom size as low as possible. Lower class sizes are allowing teachers to have more student-teacher contact time and to meet every child's individual needs. Thank you for all that you do for education, and I hope that you continue to do long-range planning and funding of education."

DeAnn Nelson, a seventh grade teacher at Tuesdell Middle School in Wichita, noted that, in her seven years of teaching, her lessons were never the same from one year to the next, not because of changing curriculum or standards but because her students were never the same, and she tailored her lessons to the different learning styles of her students. She commented, "Tailoring my lessons takes more than hard work on my part. It requires supplemental materials, time to allow innovative teaching methods, and time to collaborate with peers. I appreciate your support in allowing time for collaboration with other educators just as you must work with your other committee members." She explained that it is impossible to get to know all of her students' learning styles within her class period; therefore, she attends their activities outside the classroom. She went on to say that lower class sizes allows her to make better connection with her students and that it was her hope that the Legislature would continue to provide education funding to ensure that Kansas students are competitive and successful.

Mary Collins, a second grade teacher at Council Grove Elementary School, said that it had been her privilege to work with students for more than 30 years. She commented, "Teaching is not an easy profession. Children do not come to school on equal footing. Their home environment is a key factor in determining where their instructional level is at. It is our responsibility as educators to determine what level a child is at and then proceed from there to create an environment that will meet the needs of each individual student and to inspire them to become critical thinkers and problem solvers so they can successfully negotiate the complexities of the 21st Century. Research shows that family involvement improves student achievement, attitudes towards learning, and self-esteem. Not all children are blessed with family members who are actively engaged in their education. The structure of the family and the home has changed greatly in the three decades that I have been working with students. The world is also rapidly changing. Because of the changes in family structure and

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support and technological advances, teachers and education support professionals must be provided with adequate tools and resources in order to meet the needs of their students. The commitment of Kansas lawmakers to support public education with the three-year school finance plan is greatly appreciated. Great public schools are a basic right for every child.”

Martha Hadsall, a third grade teacher at Harper Elementary School, noted that she had seen many policy changes in her 33 years in the classroom. She noted that all-day kindergarten and pre-K are one way to decrease the achievement gap between those students who come to school with few language experiences and those who come with rich literary backgrounds. She commented, “The three-year school finance plan allowed out district to make long-term plans and to sustain some effective programs. Your commitment to the additional at-risk funds and funding special education at 92 percent means our district will offer summer school and can provide after school tutoring opportunities. But educators continue to face new challenges as things change, and early intervention remains a key component to reaching a struggling student. At Harper Elementary, the percentage of our free and reduced lunch students has doubled, changed from 30 percent to 60 percent. But the biggest change in my building is the enrollment of 20 English language learners, ranging from pre-K to eighth grade. These students deserve one-on-one time with a caring individual to work on those basic skills that they lack. Both teachers and legislators work to improve the lives of Kansans, and our jobs require adequate resources to meet the needs of our constituents. I encourage and invite you to join us in making this state a place where great education is available for every child.”

Bonnie Kastanek, Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Manhattan, stated that she has taught primary age children for 34 years. She noted, “In my school district, a mentoring program is a very important part of our staff development and an essential component of our special learning community. As a trained teacher mentor, I help many beginning teachers celebrate their achievements and build upon their successes. I reinforce their self-esteem. I help them grow professionally, share knowledge, expertise, and inspire excellence. Some of the mentoring activities that I participate in include collaborative planning, peer coaching, team teaching, conferencing, and data collection. I assist that new or beginning teacher in developing a capacity and the confidence to make their own informed decisions. It’s my personal belief, and the belief of many school districts, that teachers in their very first year of teaching definitely should be given the best opportunities for possible professional development. Creating and maintaining a highly qualified staff is also the mechanism for advancing the teaching profession. Mentoring is based upon the belief that continued improvement will encourage our beginning teachers to stay in the field of education. I would encourage you to continue your support of school funding and also to consider full funding of mentoring programs.”

Senator Teichman informed the teachers that she is a member of the Senate Task Force on K-12 Education, which was formed by the Senate President. She explained that the purpose of the task force was to determine how to ensure that at-risk dollars reach the students who need them, how to promote coordination and efficiency in early childhood programs, how to support our best and brightest students, how to attract our best and brightest into the teaching field, and how to improve math and science K-12 education. She requested that the teachers send her information and their ideas or suggestions on the task force topics she outlined. The teachers then responded to her question, “How did your school district help you become a teacher of the year.

Senator Lee asked the teachers if, in their opinion, students do not have sufficient time to study due to too their many activities outside the classroom. The responses included the following comments: (1) The activities are important because they often motivate students to do well in school so they can continue to participate in such things as basketball or football. (2) Extracurricular activities at the primary level, such as dance or traveling sports teams, do not allow the children time to be children or time to do their homework.

Senator Vratil asked how the Legislature could help teachers. In response, the teachers noted that funding for the following was very important: professional development, mentoring programs, smaller classes, and support professionals. In addition, they responded to questions regarding No Child Left Behind state assessment tests.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for January 18.

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