

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on February 25, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Sharon Wenger, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Carol Toland, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Senator Chris Steineger
Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards
Bill Reardon, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools
Nancy Keel, Kansas Parents as Teachers Association
Senator Jim Barnett
Bill Halvorsen, Chase County U.S.D. 284 Board of Education
Greg Markowitz, Superintendent, U.S.D. 284

SB 527 – An act concerning early childhood education; Parents as Teachers and Early Head Start; expansion of eligibility

Senator Chris Steinger testified in support of **SB 527**. He explained that he requested the introduction of the bill as a means to better fund and better organize early childhood development programs. He noted that current state statute provides that Parents as Teachers can be offered to children up to the end of their second year. After that, there is a program gap for Head Start until a child is eligible for admission to school. To address this issue, he believes the statute which cuts off Parents as Teachers at the end of the second year should be stricken and, instead, allow Parents as Teachers to be offered in all the years that a child is in school and also allow the local school boards to decide how they want to offer their Parents as Teachers program. He commented that, personally, he did not see any reason why the Legislature should cut off and dictate how local school boards offer Parents as Teachers. He went on to say that New Section 2 was symbolic in nature because it applies only to Early Head Start, which is a federal program. He explained that New Section 2 provides that any child not eligible for school attendance would be eligible to receive services under the Early Head Start Program, regardless of the income level of the child's family. He then called attention to balloon amendments for New Section 2. (Attachment 1)

Senator Vratil commented that, as he understood the bill, it would expand the infant and toddler program to age 6, which is the age for admission to school, and it would also expand Early Head Start. Senator Steineger reiterated that expanding the program would be up to the local school board rather than the Legislature, and he confirmed that the bill would also expand early head start to age 6, subject to appropriation. He said the intent of the bill was to create a seamless system between the birth of a child and the year the child starts to school. He noted that Section 1 (Parents as Teachers) was permissive, not mandatory. He explained that, if the balloon amendments for New Section 2 were adopted, there would be no fiscal note on the bill.

Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards, testified in support of **SB 527**. He commented that the bill would provide local school districts with more flexibility in providing parent education services; however, the additional flexibility would have limited impact without increased funding. He was uncertain if the phrase "notwithstanding any state or federal law to the contrary" in New Section 2 would jeopardize federal funding by failing to comply with federal laws or regulations. (Attachment 2)

Bill Reardon, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, testified in support of **SB 527**. He said that the district is supportive of the bill because it would provide flexibility; however, if additional funding was not provided, the authority for more flexibility would be hollow. Many of the children in the Kansas City, Kansas, public schools receive some services up to age 3, and there are a number of children in the four-year-old at-risk program; therefore, any increased funding would be concentrated on children between age 3 and 4.

Nancy Keel, Kansas Parents as Teachers Association (KPATA), explained that Parents as Teachers (PAT)

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:35 p.m. on February 25, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

and programs using the PAT curriculum primarily address parenting, family support, and child development from prenatal to 3 years of age. Currently, there over 4,500 families on the PAT waiting list, and over 70 school districts still do not have PAT prenatal to 3 years of age. She noted that, while there is a gap of services for children aged 3 to 4, the 4 to 5 year old children are currently served by the 4-year-old at-risk program, pre-K programs, and Head Start. KPATA would like to see services expanded to cover the 3 to 4 year old gap, but their primary support continues to focus on the prenatal to 3 year old waiting list and the 70 underserved districts. Ms. Keel informed the Committee that, last year, PAT programs across Kansas served over 18,000 children. The fiscal note for the 4,500 families on the waiting list is approximately \$2.6 million. She urged the Committee to continue to support current programs and to expand funding for the waiting list and/or the underserved districts. ([Attachment 3](#))

There being no others wishing to testify, the hearing on **SB 527** was closed.

SB 627 – School districts; school finance; supplemental general aid

Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office, noted that **SB 627** was introduced at the request of Senator Jim Barnett. She explained that, as drafted, the bill would provide that, when computing the amount of the supplemental general state aid for the Local Option Budget (LOB) for U.S.D. 284, located in Chase County, the assessed valuation of that district would be deemed to be equal to the assessed valuation of the school district located at the 50th percentile in the amounts paid to other districts.

Ms. Kiernan distributed a copy of a proposed amendment which would strike the original proposed language in the bill (page 2, lines 32 through 36) and insert, “Any school district with an enrollment of at least 350 pupils and not more than 500 pupils shall receive supplemental general state aid in an amount which shall not be less than 25% of the supplemental general fund budget of such district.” ([Attachment 4](#))

Senator Barnett testified in support of **SB 627**. He explained that Representative Dahl and the U.S.D 284 school board contacted him last year about Chase County being one of the counties facing the dilemma of being ranked as a high-wealth district when, in fact, the county is not wealthy. As a result, the district receives no supplemental general aid for their LOB. Chase County has a declining enrollment, and U.S.D. 284 cannot reasonably consolidate any further. The bill would help U.S.D. 284 by providing access to supplemental general fund moneys. ([Attachment 5](#)) Senator Barnett also explained that he requested the proposed amendment upon the advice of Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, Kansas Department of Education, and Senator Hensley.

Bill Halvorsen, a member of the Chase County U.S.D. 284 Board of Education, testified in support of **SB 627**. In the past 15 years, U.S.D 284, has come to depend upon the LOB to finance basic operations, including salaries. Without the locally funded LOB, U.S.D. 284 would no longer be able to conduct operations. Mr. Halvorsen observed that, with approximately 435 students and an assessed valuation of \$40 million, the district is not wealthy by any reasonable calculation. Like most non-urban districts, Chase County has experienced a decline in enrollment, yet, until the current school year, the district received no state assistance with their LOB. He noted that, under current law, 82 percent of the districts receive supplemental general state aid on their LOB, but 18 percent of the “wealthy districts” like Chase County receive nothing. He pointed out that the current calculation of supplemental state aid, in effect, puts more pressure on local taxpayers. Therefore, at some point, the cost will become unbearable, and closing schools will become the only option. He noted that the district has already consolidated to a county unit, and it would not be reasonable to have an entire county without a school district. In his opinion, the bill would provide a fiscally neutral method to address this inequity by allowing an “escape hatch” for districts such as U.S.D 284. He stated that, because Chase County is a small district, the actual amount of money appropriated would be small in relation to the total appropriation. In conclusion, he said that he did not believe that the authors of the current law intended to create a situation which punishes a district. ([Attachment 6](#))

Greg Markowitz, Superintendent of Schools for U.S.D. 284, testified in support of **SB 627**. As chief financial officer for the school district, he discussed the inequity that current law has created in Chase County. U.S.D. 284 has been a declining enrollment district for eight of the past ten budget years, and the current enrollment decline amounts to an 18.9 percent decrease over a ten-year period. U.S.D. 284 has been in an increasing assessed valuation district for nine of the past ten budget years, and by FY 2008, the general fund assessed

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:35 p.m. on February 25, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

valuation increased by 48.2 percent. The combined assessment and enrollment figures have had a drastic and increasingly “double negative” impact on the financial status of U.S.D. 284 and its ability to provide a free and appropriate public education. The taxpayers of U.S.D. 284 have increased the LOB mill levy from 8.763 mills in FY 2001-2002 up to the current mill levy of 23.160 mills. During the same time period, both federal and state mandates have increased dramatically. U.S.D. 284 has made several cuts in services and employees and has delayed repairs on rapidly aging buildings for another year. In conclusion, he stated that the patrons of U.S.D. 284 were not seeking special status, but they would appreciate any relief the Committee could grant. (Attachment 7)

Mark Tallman, Kansas Association of School Boards, submitted written testimony opposition to **SB 627**. He expressed KASB’s concern that **SB 627** is a warning sign the Kansas is headed back into a school funding crisis. He urged the Committee to begin to address the fact that school finance is linked to the broader issue of state tax policy. (Attachment 8)

The hearing on **SB 627** was closed.

Senator Schodorf called the Committee’s attention to the minutes of the February 13, 14, and 18 meetings.

Senator Pine moved to approve the minutes of the February 13, 14, and 18 meetings, seconded by Senator Teichman. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2008.