

## MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on March 10, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

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

Conferees appearing before the committee: Scott Frank, Legislative Division of Post Audit  
Senator John Vratil  
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association  
Val DeFever, Schools for Quality Education

Scott Frank, Legislative Division of Post Audit, reviewed the findings of a 2007 Post Audit study on issues related to virtual schools. He summarized the answers to the following questions addressed in the study: "How prevalent are virtual schools in Kansas, what do they cost, and how have their students performed?" and "Do the laws and regulations that govern virtual schools in Kansas provide sufficient oversight, and how do they compare to those adopted by other states?". He also outlined the topics which Post Audit recommended be included in an interim study of virtual education. (Attachment 1) He noted that the 2007 interim committee did not have enough time to complete its study; however, a Senate Education Committee subcommittee recently completed a study on virtual schools and recommended the introduction of a bill. Subsequently, **SB 669** was introduced by the Senate Education Committee.

**SB 669 – School districts; relating to virtual schools**

Senator John Vratil, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee subcommittee on virtual schools, noted that the subcommittee recommended that a definition of "virtual schools" be adopted in state statute. In addition, the subcommittee felt it is important to have adequate, if not exemplary, teacher training in virtual schools because not all teachers have the "knack" to teach over the Internet, and **SB 669** addresses this issue. He commented that one of the cornerstones of the bill is the funding for virtual schools. He pointed out that the Legislative Post Audit study on virtual schools indicated that, currently, virtual schools are probably over funded because it costs less to operate and administer a virtual school than it does for a bricks and mortar school. Thus, the subcommittee recommended the elimination of all of the various weighting factors for virtual schools and the establishment of a single weighted factor of 14 percent so that, for a full time equivalent (FTE) virtual school student, the virtual school would just get 114 percent of base state aid. He noted that 114 percent is approximately what is being provided to virtual schools at this time. The subcommittee also recommended that virtual schools be required to count its students on one day prior to September 20 of each year and on one day subsequent to September 20 but prior to October 4 and that the two enrollment figures be averaged. He noted that the count is a FTE enrollment count, not a head count enrollment. He went on to explain that the bill would give authority to the State Board of Education to adopt rules and regulations to administer virtual schools and, specifically, to enforce the statutes that relate to virtual schools.

Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association, testified as a neutral conferee on **SB 669**. He noted that growth of virtual schools in Kansas has been rapid and strong, yet there are a number of unanswered questions. Although **SB 669** addresses the issue of the appropriate level of funding and the definition of a virtual school, KNEA believes that it is imperative that, as virtual schooling grows, accountability of student learning should be kept in mind. In this regard, he distributed copies of a publication entitled "Guide to Online High School Courses," which was developed by KNEA in collaboration with other organizations related to education and CNA, IBM, and Verizon. He noted that the publication focuses on high school courses, but the content is applicable to any discussion of online or virtual schooling. He called attention to the pages in the publication which list a series of questions for policy makers and a series of rubrics for the evaluation of online offerings in the areas of curriculum, instructional design, teacher quality, the student role, assessment, management and support systems, and the technical infrastructure. (Attachment 2)

## CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:35 p.m. on March 10, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Val DeFever, Schools for Quality Education, testified a neutral conferee on **SB 669**. She expressed her concerns about rural communities' access to the technology required by a virtual school. She noted that rural districts are more likely to have fewer dollars to invest in technology, yet their need is more immediate since their students may have fewer offerings available in house. Therefore, she felt that it would be appropriate to build a higher level of "start up" funding into the first year or two that a virtual school is being established. She also noted that, as virtual schools expand, it is very likely that there will be an increase in the number of at-risk students who need more assistance from staff members. Noting that this increase may require higher levels of training of staff members or the addition of staff members, she suggested that the State Board Education and the Legislative Division of Post Audit look at the population being served by Kansas virtual schools and advise the Legislature on whether base state aid per pupil plus 14 percent is adequately funding these schools. (Attachment 3)

There being no others wishing to testify, the hearing on **SB 669** was closed.

Senator Vratil moved to recommend **SB 669** favorably for passage, seconded by Senator Pine. The motion carried.

Senator Schodorf called the Committee's attention to the minutes of the March 6 meeting.

Senator Teichman moved to approve the minutes of the March 6 meeting, seconded by Senator Lee. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2008.