

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:40 p.m. on March 7, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Carolyn Rampey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Bill Reardon, USD 500, Kansas City, Kansas
Bob Vancrum, USD 229, Blue Valley
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association
Terry Holdren, Kansas Farm Bureau

SB 584—Relating to School Finance

Bill Reardon, representing the Kansas City, Kansas, school district (USD 500), testified in support of the at-risk and urban poverty weighting provisions in **SB 584**. He noted that no other urban district has an at-risk population as high as USD 500 (63%), and the bill would help ensure that the district could continue to make educational progress with its at-risk children. However, he was concerned that the total dollars contained in the three-year plan was dramatically lower than recommended by cost analysis studies and the Kansas Supreme Court. In conclusion, he commented that the bill was a good first step, and it was a compliment to leaders of both parties who set aside partisan differences in order to meet the educational needs of all Kansas children. (Attachment 1)

Bob Vancrum, representing the Blue Valley school district (USD 229), expressed his support for the provision in **SB 584** which would take the special education funding to 98 percent, and he noted that he had no objection to the additional mandatory 2.5 percent LOB. However, he was concerned that the “fatally flawed” definition of at-risk students remained and that the Legislative Post Audit’s recommendation for the implementation of a regional cost adjustment was not included. In addition, he questioned if there was any rationale in leaving the caps on the budget authority of a district once state funding brings the funding for all districts up to the adequate level. He emphasized that, since 1992, Blue Valley patrons and the school board have been denied the right to choose locally what they wish to pay for schools, which seemed unfair when most school districts are permitted to spend more. (Attachment 2)

Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association (KNEA), discussed the aspects of **SB 584** which KNEA believed were appropriate responses to the needs of school districts (the increase in the reimbursement of special education costs, the increase in the at-risk weighting, the new high at-risk weighting, and unaltered low enrollment weighting). He encouraged the Committee to include the phase-in of all-day kindergarten as requested by the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education. He expressed his concern that the bill did little to address the issue of salaries and benefits for teachers and administrators. To illustrate his point, he reviewed relevant data shown attached to his written testimony. He went on to say that the high at-risk weighting was significantly lower than recommended in the Legislative Post Audit study, and the “mandatory student performance improvement fund” mostly just renamed current resources. He suggested changes in the in both **HB 2986** and **SB 584** for at-risk weighting, high at-risk weighting, and base state aid per pupil. He noted that **HB 2986** allowed more flexibility with the funds received by school districts and expressed support for that approach. On the issue of the LOB, he commented that renamed money is not new funding and urged the Committee to focus on “real state funding” of a state responsibility. In conclusion, he emphasized that the slow phase-in of funds would not get school districts where they need to be to address the needs of the most vulnerable students and the needs of the teaching force. (Attachment 3)

Terry Holdren, Kansas Farm Bureau, commented that the members of Kansas Farm Bureau understand the diversity that Kansas schools must overcome, and they support both correlation and low enrollment weightings as mechanisms by which resources can be provided to attempt to bridge the gap. Members are also supportive of the current levels of funding for transportation and vocational education. However, they do not support any increase in LOB authority and request that the Committee consider removing it from **SB 584** as one of the most disequalizing aspects of the current formula. He noted that, in an opinion issued last June,

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the Kansas Supreme Court concluded that increases in the LOB cap exacerbate wealth-based disparity between districts. ([Attachment 4](#))

Senator Schodorf called attention to memorandum from Ken Willard, Legislative Coordinator, Kansas State Board of Education, regarding the legislative recommendations which the Board believes will improve the quality of education in the state and close the achievement gap. ([Attachment 5](#))

Senator Steineger distributed copies of a memorandum prepared by the State Department of Education at his request concerning the projected costs for phasing in all-day kindergarten over a three-year period and increasing the funding for the parents as teachers program. ([Attachment 6](#)) He explained, "Yesterday, the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education agreed to the first year of the phase-in of all-day kindergarten be committed to the \$15,000,000 for the first year, and we agreed to write a proviso that we think we should in ensuing years commit to the second and third year of all-day kindergarten. The other half of this page is on parents as teachers. Parents as teachers is an early childhood program. It applies to children from birth to, I think, age 3. It funds a program where a few staffers in each school district will go out and meet with new parents and tell them about early brain development and help them to get their child prepared, in learning in early years, to get prepared to go to school. That's a great program. You get a lot of return for your money. The way this program works is, it costs about \$1,200 per family or per child to go through parents as teachers, and right now the State of Kansas funds 35 percent of each one of those families. The local school district is expected to pick up the other 65 percent. Also, right now we have about 3,268 families that have signed up for parents as teachers, but there's no funding for them. And I would hope that this Committee would consider committing ourselves to at least funding the state's portion, the 35 percent match, on parents as teachers. It costs us \$1.375 million, which is really, really cheap considering that these early childhood programs like parents as teachers, head start, all-day kindergarten – they pay out in the long run by lowering the amount of at-risk kids we're going to have in the future. So I think to spend \$1.375 million now probably saves us \$10 million or \$20 million down the road. And at the appropriate time, I hope we'll consider adding that to our budget."

In response to comments from committee members questioning the authority of a Ways and Means subcommittee to write a proviso for funding to the Education Committee, Senator Steineger stated, "The Ways and Means Committee appropriates money, and we also make policy. Most other committees in the Legislature are policy making and not appropriating committees, and Ways and Means actually does both. The question came up yesterday on how do we rationalize or how do we dovetail our action yesterday with what the Education Committee may or may not do, and we decided that, as a Ways and Means subcommittee, we could decide that we need to spend this money and that, as the school finance bill works its way through the committee process, we can align the two policies and agree to them." Senator Schodorf commented, "It's an overlap, and it's a fine line who has the authority. With all due respect, the Chair of the subcommittee felt very strongly about this, and this is the initial discussion on whether it would even stay in the budget. So it's a fine line about who has the authority, and I think both."

At the request of Senator Pine, Senator Lee distributed copies of the chart (prepared by the Department of Education) which was used by the working group that drafted the Senate education plan (**SB 584**). She explained that, for each USD, the chart showed the number of full-time enrollment students, the number of at-risk students, and the percent of free meal students. ([Attachment 7](#))

Senator Apple requested more information on equalization of local option budgets. In response, Senator Lee distributed copies of a memorandum and a table prepared by the Department of Education in January at her request, which related to his questions. The table contained data relating to 2005-06 local option budgets and potential mill levies. ([Attachment 8](#))

Senator Schodorf called attention to the minutes of the February 16, 20, and 21 meetings.

Senator Teichman moved to approve the minutes of the February 16, 20, and 21 meetings, seconded by Senator Apple. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2006.

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