

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on January 12, 2005, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

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

Conferees appearing before the committee: Dr. Andy Tompkins, Commissioner of Education

Senator Shodorf asked committee members if they had further questions for Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Board of Education, relating to his presentation on school finance at the January 11 meeting. Senator Apple requested that Mr. Dennis provide data on the assessed valuation per student broken down by district. Mr. Dennis agreed to provide the information, noting that, due to the wide variation in assessed valuation, equalization is one of the most difficult challenges for legislators.

Senator McGinn commented that, after the 1992 formula, programs such as those for at risk students, QPA, and No Child Left Behind were put in place, and the additional programs required support staff and extra administrators. She requested that Mr. Dennis provide data on the correlation between the additional programs and the increase in the number of administrators. She noted that it has been suggested that administrative positions be consolidated. In considering that suggestion, it would be necessary for committee members to know exactly what administrative positions are currently in place to determine if the additional positions were justified. Senator Vratil commented, "There is additional support staff, but I would guess that largest percentage of this new support staff is paraprofessionals in special education. And the reason you have those people, when you didn't have them years ago, is because, quite frankly, it is cheaper to have paraprofessionals than it is to hire teachers. So they are doing it in the most effective and economical way." Senator Lee added, "One of the other reasons for the dramatic increase in paras is the fact that we have to include special education children in the regular classroom." She noted that in touring the Shawnee Mission school district as well as her own school district, she was told that it was necessary to add paraprofessionals because teachers must have support in order to teach regular children and also work with children with disabilities. Mr. Dennis noted that paras are sometimes hired because a special education teacher is not available. He informed the Committee that there are more teacher vacancies in special education than in any other area. Because of shortage, special education children are assigned to teachers who teach regular students, and paraprofessionals are assigned to the teachers. Senator McGinn stated that she supported the use of paraprofessionals and that her question regarded the increase in the number of administrators since 1992. Senator Goodwin noted that, when Winfield State Hospital was closed, children with disabilities who were formerly in the hospital were placed in Winfield public schools. The additional children in the school system required additional administrators. In response to Senator McGinn, Mr. Dennis agreed to provide a statewide comparison between certified staff and non-certified staff after 1992 to the present.

Senator Schodorf called upon Dr. Andy Tompkins, Commissioner of Education, for an update on the status of elementary-secondary education in Kansas. At the outset, Dr. Tompkins noted that Kansas has approximately 466,000 students and 301 school districts with a median school district size of 550. Of the total student population, 11 % are Hispanic, 9% are African American, 75% are white, 2% are Asian, and 3% are other. In addition, he noted that 5.5% of Kansas schools have English language learners, and 13% have children with disabilities. He went on to discuss trend data relating to the achievements of Kansas students over the past five years, and he also compared the data to the national average. He discussed the following: the increase in English language learners, the increase in special education enrollment, the improved graduation rate, and the improved attendance rate. In addition, he discussed the increased levels of proficiency in reading skills for students with disabilities, for English language learners, for male and female students, and for African American and Hispanic students. He emphasized that the number of Kansas schools reaching the standard of excellence in reading, writing, and mathematics has increased dramatically in the past five years. He reported that Kansas spends approximately \$600 to \$700 per pupil under the national average, that Kansas' student achievement is in the top ten nationally, that the salary for Kansas'

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teachers ranks 41st nationally, and that Kansas' teacher qualifications rank at the top nationally. He also discussed the progress Kansas schools have made in meeting federal requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP). He explained that AYP refers to the mandate that all students in the state must be proficient by 2014. In this regard, he called attention to charts in his handout showing the AYP state profile for school districts and schools between 2003 and 2004. He followed with a description of changes in mathematics and reading assessments anticipated in 2005-2006. In conclusion, Dr. Tompkins said he was concerned about the increasing expectations at a time of limited resources, the declining federal support, and the declining availability of highly qualified teachers and school leaders; however, he was encouraged by the genuine commitment to making adjustments to the system to serve a variety of needs, by the expanding number of high performing schools, and by the knowledgeable teaching and leadership staff focused on student learning. (Attachment 1)

Senator Schodorf called the Committee's attention to copies of a memorandum prepared by the Kansas Legislative Research Department which provides a chronology of the main amendments to the 1992 School District Finance and Quality Performance Act and the 1992 School District Capital Improvements State Aid Law. (Attachment 2)

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

The next meeting is scheduled for January 13, 2005.