

MINUTES

2010 COMMISSION

April 16-17, 2007

Geary County, Salina, and Colby USDs

Members Present

Rochelle Chronister, Chairperson
Dr. Ray Daniels, Vice Chairperson
Representative Sue Storm
Dennis Jones
Dr. Barbara Mackey
Barbara Hinton, Legislative Post Auditor
Lee Urban, Attorney General's Office

Members Absent

Stephen Iliff
Senator Jean Kurtis Schodorf
Representative Clay Aurand
Carolyn L. Campbell

Staff Present

Ashley Holm, Legislative Research Department
Sharon Wenger, Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office
Dianne Rosel, Revisor of Statutes Office

Others Present

Scott Frank, Legislative Division of Post Audit
Katrin Osterhaus, Legislative Division of Post Audit
Brenda Heafey, Legislative Division of Post Audit

**Monday, April 16
Geary County USD**

Dr. Ron Walker, Superintendent of USD 475, Geary County, greeted the Commission along with other USD 475 staff, including: Jan Pabitzky, Chief Information Officer, Pat Anderson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Division, Ricardo Vieyra, Director of Special Education, and Larry Dixon, Associate Superintendent.

Highlights of the District were presented in [Attachment 1](#).

The enrollment for USD 475 on September 20, 2006, was 6,378 students in grades K-12. Approximately 52 percent of the District's students live in families with a member in the military service. Over half of the students from military families newly entering the District are two years behind their grade level. About 1,000 students are on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for disabilities. The District has 108 FTE licensed staff with a 25 percent annual turn-over rate. This is the District's first year offering all-day kindergarten.

For the 2005-06 school year, the District did make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

District staff told Commission members one of the greatest challenges to the District is the phenomenal growth in the community because of the expected increase in military personnel over the next few years. District staff expect an 8,000 to 10,000 increase in the student population by the year 2011. Over 2,000 housing units currently are under construction, in addition to 1,451 lots slated for housing construction. The community's assessed valuation increased over 31 percent between 2004 and 2006. The mill levy increased seven mills in the current year due to a school bond levy passed in 2005. In spite of these challenges, this District was one of the 17 districts cited in the 2006 Standard and Poor's Report of Highly Resource-Effective School Districts.

Staff conducted a tour of District facilities, highlighting the following programs. Senator Roger Reitz and Representative Barbara Craft joined Commission members on the District tour.

Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program

This Program, funded with tobacco settlement funds, is one of only seven such pilot programs in Kansas. It is in its first year of operation. The pilot is operated as a partnership between USD 475 and Fort Riley's Child Youth Services. It serves 32 children on a full-day basis. All but one of the 32 children are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunches. Seventy-five percent of the children are from military families; 35 percent have English as their second language (ESL); and 30 percent are on IEPs. This pilot uses a literacy-based program entitled "Success for All" [Attachment 2](#). This pilot is similar to four-year old at-risk programs; however, four-year old programs are only one-half day in length. Because this is one of the State's seven pilot pre-kindergarten programs being funded with tobacco settlement moneys, it is evaluated via a Children's Cabinet contract with the University of Kansas and Rutgers University. District staff are not yet privy to the results of this evaluation.

Pre-Natal Program

The District cooperates with community agencies to provide a pre-natal program. Cooperation is done in the following ways: the Junction City Geary County Health Department (GCHD) through their Maternal & Infant (M&I) Program primarily through a Smart Start Kansas (SSK)

of Geary County grant (awarded to USD 475) provides funding for one nurse, who is a school district employee, with an office at the Geary County Health Department. This nurse teaches pre-natal classes to expectant mothers and administers a screening instrument which takes about 15 minutes and predicts with 92 percent accuracy if a child could be exposed to child abuse within the first 12 months of life. Based on findings from the screening, connections are made with appropriate agencies such as: Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program, Parents As Teachers, or M&I, thereby improving birth outcomes for mothers and babies. The SSK Nurse and a GCHD nurse have also collaborated on ensuring immunizations are up to date, thus the district has one of the highest immunization completion percentages for children 12-35 months of age. District staff also collaborate on The Teen Pregnancy Case Management Program through the SSK grant with the Parents as Teachers component doing pre-natal to 36 months monthly in home visits using the "Born To Learn" Curriculum. The District also collaborates with a local gynecologist whose office makes referrals to its nursing program.

Ensuring Academic Success

A variety of programs assist students who have fallen behind academically.

- The District operates "Project Second Chance" at the middle and high school levels. This is an alternative program, operating during the school day, for students who do not meet promotion requirements. Students are given an opportunity to earn their way back to grade level in a setting with a 10:1 student/teacher ratio.
- Before and after school tutoring is offered, Monday through Friday.
- An after-school program is offered for suspended students falling behind academically. It is available every school day between 3:15 p.m. and 6:15 p.m.
- Other programs are described in Attachment 1.

Other Issues and Comments from USD 475 Geary County Staff

- Locating special education teachers is very difficult. Between 45 and 50 candidates are interviewed every year for 25 special education teacher positions.
- District staff indicated it is difficult for special education teacher candidates coming to Kansas from out-of-state to meet the licensure requirements of the Kansas Department of Education.
- Teacher salaries remain low, in part, to allow the District to provide all-day kindergarten.
- The District levies a 25 percent local option budget. Last year the district passed a \$33 million bond levy which will be used to construct new attendance centers.
- The second enrollment count date on February 20 has helped fund new teaching positions to assist with the additional student load from the military build up. The District brought 44 new teachers in two years ago to train them early, increasing preparedness for new students.

- The District has a 16:1 student/teacher ratio, but it is slowly moving to 20:1 and the middle and high schools are already at a 25:1 ratio.
- There are about 30 different languages spoken in the District. District staff engage parents via aides who speak the parents' native language. Between 50 and 60 teachers in the District have the ELL endorsement.
- There are many at-risk students in the District especially among the military population. This requires additional social workers and counselors in the District. For many of the District's military families, they are experiencing the third and fourth deployments with an accompanied great risk of death, placing a great deal of stress on family members.
- Because there are 38 students in the 8th grade, another 8th grade teacher is needed.

Salina USD

Dr. Rob Winter, Superintendent, greeted Commission members. Other USD staff present included: Dr. Marilyn Green, Executive Director of School Improvement; Cynthia Adcock, Migrant and ESL Coordinator; Nancy Kiltz, Director of At-Risk Services; and Brenda Ascher, Executive Director of the Central Cooperative in Education.

Representative Deena Horst also joined Commission members.

In the 2005-06 school year, the District has an enrollment of 7,399 students. Attachment 3 provides additional demographic information. The District did not make AYP in the 2005-06 school year because two student groups did not meet the proficiency goals in reading. Those groups were students with disabilities and English language learners.

The following programs were highlighted by USD staff.

English as a Second Language Program

In addition to nine ESL teachers, the District has 31 classroom teachers with ESL endorsements and 15 who have completed training but do not yet have the endorsement. The District serves students speaking six different languages.

The elementary ESL program is a "pull out" program with students leaving their regular classroom to work with an ESL teacher 30 minutes per day.

In middle and high school, there are classes in core subjects designed for ESL students.

At-Risk Programs

The Salina USD provides a variety of at-risk programs (Attachment 4).

At the elementary level, District staff provide additional instruction and intensive programs for students identified as at-risk (below grade level in reading or math). Six at-risk reading teachers work with students through one-on-one instruction. Pre- and post-assessments are given and monitoring of student progress is continued throughout the year.

Programs at the middle schools include double dip math (two sessions of math for added support), math labs, intensive reading classes, and reading coaches. High schools students have math labs and intensive reading classes and a program entitled "Performance Based Diploma" where students have an alternative way to take courses. This Program is a combination of small group and computer-assisted instruction so students can work at their own pace.

Special Education Programs

A visit to South High School highlighted the District's special education program for students who are severely mentally disabled. This program is staff intensive with some students needing nursing services to allow them to attend school. Staff told of their concern with students aged 18-21. Because it is becoming so difficult for parents to find placements in the community for adult children, parents rely on the District to maintain programming to the maximum age of 21.

District staff expressed several concerns regarding special education.

- Attracting and retaining staff.
- Number of teachers on waivers.
- Increased staffing needs.
- Increasing number of students identified as autistic.
- Changes in Medicaid resulting in decreased funding.
- Increased work load for staff.

Commission members spoke with one long-term (27+ years) special education teacher who just last year had a lift device installed in her room to enable her to lift students to a changing table. Before last year, she bore the responsibility for lifting adult students with no mechanical assistance.

Other Issues and Comments from USD 305 Salina Staff

Additional school finance funding is being used for at-risk programs, summer programs, the Performance Based Diploma Program, paying a bilingual social worker, implementing the School within a School Program, hiring an at-risk program director, and ESL program improvements.

Tuesday, April 17 Colby USD 315

Kirk Nielson, Superintendent, greeted Commission members. Other staff present included Diana Wieland, Principal of Thomas County Academy (charter school) and the District's Curriculum Director. School board member Janice Frahm joined Commission members. Senator Ralph Ostmeyer and Representative Jim Morrison also greeted Commission members.

USD 315 has approximately 1,000 students. The District is accredited by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA). The District has a charter

school – Thomas County Academy – which has 18 students (two are virtual students) in grades five through eight. This is the second year of the charter school’s operation. The District had no problem gaining approval from the Kansas Department of Education to operate the charter school because the school’s program is achievement based and self contained. The charter school was opened using grant funds. The District has all-day kindergarten. The District has only three ESL students. The District uses a student credentialing process to track each student’s progress, report that progress to each student’s parents, and describe the interventions that will be implemented to bring the student to a proficient level. A copy of the credentialing form used is Attachment 5.

For the 2005-06 school year, this District did make AYP.

Elementary Programs

District staff highlighted programs targeting students’ reading difficulties, particularly those students with dyslexia. Programs are designed to meet the needs of individual students. In addition, strategies to improve reading skills are built into all subjects, including social sciences, music, and other subject areas. Students separated within class periods have rotations which place students with similar reading levels, even when they come from different grades, together to practice reading.

State assessment scores are reported on a student’s report card, as well as each student in the District having a “credentialing form” which clearly describes the student’s score on assessment tests and interventions described regarding how to assist failing students to become proficient.

Other Issues and Comments from USD 315 Colby Staff

Particular challenges to the District include:

- Problems with KSDE and getting teachers certified, particularly middle level science teachers.
- No levy for capital outlay.

District business office staff indicated the additional school finance funding was used primarily for staff salaries. Supplemental general funds are used for building repairs because the District does not have a capital outlay mill levy. Additional at-risk funding is used for before- and after-school programs.

The vocational education weighting in the school finance formula allows the District to maintain vocational education programs. Because of the small number of students in the auto mechanics class, the District dropped the class, and students attend Northwest Technical College for auto mechanics instruction.

Colby Charter School Tour: Thomas County Academy

Thomas County Academy (TCA) was designed to provide a unique and comfortable learning environment for students between 5th and 9th grade. The purpose of TCA is to satisfy core curriculum requirements by use of non-traditional teaching methods. For each subject, students are given a checklist of the State requirements to be covered over the course of the semester. Two full-time teachers and the students cooperatively create projects and assignments to fulfill state mandates.

TCA students participate in elective courses and athletics with the main school body. Students voluntarily decide to attend the charter school for a variety of reasons. Primary reasons cited by the classroom teacher were:

- Parents and students wanted a small classroom atmosphere;
- Parents believed their child was more likely to “fall through the cracks” in a traditional classroom setting; and
- Parents wanted an alternative environment because the student was struggling in core curriculum classes.

The primary difference between TCA and the traditional Colby school system is that the teacher is given a significant amount of flexibility to personalize core subject matter to a student’s personal interests. The teacher cited numerous examples of how she was able to take a seemingly uninteresting subject and transform the content so the student remained engaged. Another key difference is the physical classroom environment. Students do not sit at desks; they are either working on laptops in a beanbag, recliner, or sitting at one of the three group tables working on homework.

Commission members made several positive observations regarding the Thomas County Academy:

- The energy of the teacher. The group was impressed at how she was able to tap into the creativity and personal interests of the students.
- The classroom cultivated a unique group learning environment that developed practical skills for students to take into the workplace.
- The classroom size fostered strong friendships. The teacher noted that it is common for students in TCA, on their own initiative, to volunteer for community events as a group.
- The use of cutting edge video technology improved the learning environment. One of the students working on a history project said, “We are more excited about learning because we get to use video technology to be creative.” The technology fostered a remarkable group environment, allowed students to improve communication skills, and created a platform for students to get excited about presenting core subject matter to others.
- With personalized curriculum, students often went above and beyond State requirements.

Challenges noted for Thomas County Academy

- One primary question and concern was performance by TCA students on state standardized tests. An administrator commented they were on par with the main student body, but because the school was only in its second year of operation, it was too early to make a conclusive determination.
- There were questions about how the students socially integrated into the High School from the intimate group setting. The teacher said the transition went well because TCA students were participating concurrently in elective courses with the main student body.
- Administrators discussed challenges with physical expansion of the building to grow the TCA. Administrators expressed concerns because local bond issues

had failed in the past, and the District at present is in need of increased capital outlay funds to match current and future expenditures on school improvements.

- One administrator expressed concerns about charter school funding. Specifically noting that federal funding was only adequate for a time period, but they would need support from the state or non-profit organizations to continue to grow TCA.
- The teacher and administrators also commented they were receiving support from national charter school organizations, but would like to see reform in Kansas law so that it was more charter school friendly.

Colby High School (CHS)

Commission members met with the High School Principal and Vocational Counselor to tour the facility. Colby High School is currently a class 4A school, but given the declining population, may be classified as 3A within the next few years. CHS has a very low English Language Learner (ELL) population. A total of two students are classified as ELL this calendar year. They are ELL because they are foreign exchange students. CHS is regionally known for its high quality music and arts programs. With support from the community, it has expanded the theater capacity for plays, musicals, forensics, and community events. CHS also is expanding in the area of technology. CHS has a dedicated technology center covering a variety of applied science areas – from electrical engineering to website design.

Positive Observations

- CHS has a very well organized career and vocational program. CHS matches students with local business for semester internships.
- CHS is seeing positive results and turnaround with at-risk students. The Principal cited early intervention and high quality teachers as the primary basis for success with at-risk students.
- CHS works with local community colleges and vocational schools to establish college transfer credit and a cooperative environment so the students have an easier transition into their next level of education.
- CHS has a very good understanding of its special education needs and has an open line of communication with the middle school to ensure students with special needs experience a smooth transition into CHS.
- CHS has very strong arts, music, and applied science and technology programs.

Challenges

- Teacher retention and recruitment is the primary concern for CHS. Given the rural location, state teacher requirements, and state pay for new and veteran teachers, CHS is having difficulty competing for and retaining teachers.

2010 Commission members left Colby at 12:30 p.m.

Prepared by Sharon Wenger

Approved by Commission on:

May 18, 2007
(date)

