

Approved March 29, 1988
Date

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Denise Apt at
Chairperson

3:30 ~~xx~~/p.m. on March 23, 1988 in room 519-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Committee staff present:

Avis Swartzman, Revisor of Statutes' Office
Ben Barrett, Legislative Research
Thelma Canaday, Secretary to the Committee

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Representative Ramirez
Ms. Kay Coles, Kansas National Education Association
Ms. Janet Blume, Kindergarten teacher, U.S.D. #453, Leavenworth
Ms. Carolyn Kehr, Kansas Federation of Teachers

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Apt and hearings on HCR 5052, commending school districts which provide developmental screening for children prior to entering school and urging other school districts to do the same, were opened.

Representative Ramirez encouraged the adoption of HCR 5052 and stated the information gained from developmental screening is valuable to determine learning readiness and appropriate placement of children as they enter school.

Ms. Kay Coles spoke in support of HCR 5052. Ms. Coles pointed out developmental screening appears to be a better device for determining appropriate placement of students entering school than the arbitrary cutoff date recommended in the past. (Attachment 1)

Ms. Janet Blume testified in favor of HCR 5052. Ms. Blume stated it is now quite easy and possible to determine behavior age by relatively simple tests. She referred to the Gesell Institute test as an example of effective testing for developmental behavior. (Attachment 2)

Ms. Carolyn Kehr spoke in support of HCR 5052. Ms. Kehr observed just because a child may have reached the age at which he may enter school does not mean he is ready for that experience. (Attachment 3)

Following a period of questions and discussion hearings on HCR 5052 were closed by the chairman.

Chairman Apt drew attention to S.B. 459, an act concerning the minimum competency assessment program.

Representative R. D. Miller moved S.B. 459 for favorable passage. Seconded by Representative Laird. Motion carried.

The chair drew attention to S.B. 495, an act concerning community colleges, relating to rates of student tuition.

A motion was made by Representative Williams to pass S.B. 495 favorably. Seconded by Representative R. D. Miller. Motion carried.

The chair drew attention to S.B. 577. A period of discussion followed. No action was taken on S.B. 577.

Chairman Apt drew the committee's attention to S.B. 602, an act

Unless specifically noted, the individual remarks recorded herein have not been transcribed verbatim. Individual remarks as reported herein have not been submitted to the individuals appearing before the committee for editing or corrections.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

room 519-S, Statehouse, at 3:30 ~~am~~ p.m. on March 23, 1988.

concerning public institutions of postsecondary education; relating to residence requirements for fee purposes.

Representative Williams moved S.B. 602 be passed favorably. Representative Pottorff seconded the motion. Motion carried.

S.B. 616, an act establishing the Kansas-Rhodes scholarship program was brought before the committee.

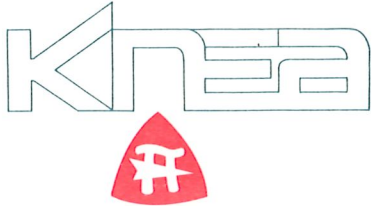
Representative Harder moved to amend in Section 2, line 41, following the word "scholar" the words..."as a full time student in a specified scholarship program". Seconded by Representative Reardon. The motion to amend carried.

Representative David Miller made a conceptual motion to amend subject to appropriation acts. Seconded by Representative Lowther. Motion to amend carried.

Representative Blumenthal moved to pass S.B. 616 favorably as amended. Seconded by Representative Lowther. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman at 4:35.

The next meeting will be Monday, March 28, 1988 at 3:30 p.m. in Room 519-S.



Kay Coles Testimony Before The
House Education Committee
Wednesday, March 23, 1988

Thank you, Madame Chairman. Members of the committee, my name is Kay Coles and I represent the 22,000 members of Kansas-NEA. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the committee about HCR 5052.

Those of you who have been on the committee in past years may remember bills we have asked for introduction regarding moving the starting age of kindergarten back so that students would be older when they enter formal schooling. We have presented testimony about the readiness of youngsters for formal education and by moving back the time a higher percentage of students would be prepared developmentally.

This year we have taken a different approach. Instead of an arbitrary cutoff date, we are suggesting that developmental screening be used to determine appropriate placement of all students entering schools. We believe that developmental screening can identify potential problems and hopefully avert them with appropriate placement. Districts in Kansas are now utilizing this developmental screening technique and we are asking the legislature to encourage other districts to utilize this developmental screening which will hopefully improve the education offered to the children as they enter our schools.

Janet Blume, one of our members in Leavenworth, will explain a bit more about the developmental screening process. Kansas-NEA asks that you act favorably on HCR 5052. Thank you for listening to our concerns.

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 5052

March 23, 1988

Madam Chairman, members of the House Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in support of HCR 5052. There's an old saying that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I believe that many of the recurring problems we see in our schools today can be prevented by allowing children to begin their formal schooling when they are developmentally ready. House Concurrent Resolution 5052 commends school districts in Kansas that have had the wisdom and foresight to provide developmental screening for children prior to their entry into school. Most state legislatures have passed legislation that say children are ready to start school when they have reached a certain chronological age. But, it is not the child's age in years which proves the best clue as to whether or not he is ready for the work of any given grade. Instead, actual practice shows that the very best measure of readiness for the work of any grade is not age in years but, rather, behavior age. Behavior age means just what it sounds like. It means the age at which a child is behaving---his developmental age.

Twenty years ago the idea that a child should be placed in school according to his maturational age rather than his chronological age was fairly new. Slowly the concept is taking hold, and the success stories are multiplying. It is now quite easy and possible to determine behavior age by relatively simple tests. The Gesell Institute, founded in 1950, located in New Haven, Connecticut has developed such a "test" as a result of their studies in child development. It is their finding that behavior is to a large

*Attachment 2
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extent a function of structure (that is, that people behave as they do because of the way their bodies and brains are constructed). This means that you cannot appreciably hurry or speed up the time at which a child walks, or talks, or is ready to read and write, adjust and cope with the demands of a school situation. Another important finding was that unready children did not, in succeeding years, "catch up" with the ready ones. If growth is proceeding at an "average" rate, a child's behavior grows about a year in one year's time. But it does not as a rule grow more than a year in one year, and it would have to do that if the child were going to "catch up." When children are over-placed (that is, placed in a grade which is far beyond their ability and maturity level), they tend to escape. Perhaps not literally. They go to school every day and sit in the assigned seat. They escape by not doing the work required, by not "behaving" in class, by daydreaming, by looking out the window, by not holding up physically and emotionally in the classroom and/or at home.

Some believe that, to solve the problem, curriculums should be adjusted. But even Kindergarten, with increasing academic demands, is no longer Kindergarten in the true sense of the word. Since the body of knowledge which must be covered in the schools today is greater than ever, it seems more realistic and effective to work on the other variable--the child's ability to perform. Rather than setting the over-all curriculum back a grade all along the way, the best solution would be to check and see that each child was ready for what each of the various grades demands.

We are all too ready, in our schools, to force children to respond to learning stimuli before their neuromuscular systems are capable of making correct responses. This early "forcing" has its beginning in our very first teachings of the language arts--listening,

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speaking, reading and writing. No child sets out in life to be a failure, a drop-out or a juvenile delinquent. He learns to be one. He learns to be one by being literally forced to become one because of his inability to adjust himself to the learning stimuli presented to him in school.

HCR 5052 also encourages all other school districts to provide developmental screening and appropriate placement. It is my hope that the information presented to you today will help you to decide to send this message to the school districts in Kansas, thus taking a step in the direction of trying to insure more success in our schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Blume

Janet Blume
Kindergarten teacher
Leavenworth, Kansas

The kindergarten hurdle

Shawnee Mission allows youngsters time to mature

By Mike Kennedy
Of the Metropolitan Staff

For Timothy Hensel, kindergarten last year was not a fun place to be.

"He didn't have any confidence," said his mother, Terry Hensel. "He could not sit still or pay attention."

A few years ago Timothy would have had to repeat the same kindergarten program, stay home for a year or go on to first grade, where his problems might have continued.

The Shawnee Mission School District is giving children like Timothy another choice. It has established Transition to First Grade (T-1) and "pre-kindergarten" classes specifically for "behaviorally young" children who become frustrated in a traditional class.

"It's the best program for small kids," Hensel said. "They build the kids' confidence. They teach them at a slower pace."

Timothy, who will be 7 in late May, is in a T-1 class at Crestview Elementary School.

"Now he likes what they're doing," his mother said. "When I keep him home because he's sick, he gets mad at me. I've never had that before."

The pilot project is in its second year. T-1 classes are available in six schools for children who have been through kindergarten but are not ready for first grade. Pre-kindergarten classes are available in 10 elementary schools.
See SHAWNEE, A-6, Col. 3



Andy Nelson/Staff

A Transition to First Grade class at Crestview Elementary School, taught by Cathy Siens, features more play and less paper work.

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Shawnee Mission classes build maturity

Continued from Page A-1

mentary schools for children who are legally of age but aren't ready for kindergarten.

After a year of pre-kindergarten, children move on to a year of traditional kindergarten. Children in T-1 classes will go on to first grade.

A child must be 5 years old by Sept. 1 to start kindergarten. But at that age, a difference of a few months can be significant in the development of a child. Many of the children placed in pre-kindergarten or T-1 have late summer birthdays and would have been among the youngest in their class.

"Some children are not ready," said Betty Barton, principal of Cherokee Elementary School. "It doesn't happen overnight on Sept. 1."

Dr. Richard Don Blim, a Kansas City pediatrician and past president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said: "Making a determination that a child is ready for school merely because of a chronological age has never made sense. I often recommend that children not be enrolled in kindergarten. An interim year is an innovative and appropriate step."

Less work and more play

In pre-kindergarten and T-1 classes, the focus is less on academics and intellectual achievement, and more on social, emotional and physical growth and development.

Rather than a lot of work with pencil and paper while seated at a desk, the curriculum in these classes emphasizes play, social interaction and hands-on activity such as painting or using clay.

"Table and chair work is not appropriate for them," Barton said. "Their muscle and eye coordination is not developed, and their attention spans are short."

The programs are designed to make a child's first school experience successful while allowing the child to mature an extra year.

"This helps their self-concept," said Debbie Converse, who teaches pre-kindergarten at Brookridge Elementary School. "They don't feel over their heads."

Blim said, "The most important thing we can give to children is self-esteem."

Barton often describes the program to parents as "red-shirting" for educational instead of athletic reasons.

"Maturity always helps," she said. "You make better choices."

Barton said that the district is expected to add more classes to the program next year. As it evaluates the program over the next few years, Shawnee Mission will examine whether children's initial school experience needs to be restructured.

The district began considering such a program several years ago, Associate Superintendent Donald Wilson said, when area pediatricians told the district they were seeing increased stress in young children.

The rise of the "superbaby syndrome," in which parents gear their children for high achievement at an

early age, has gradually transformed kindergarten into a more academic experience, Barton said.

Children are now expected to learn letter sounds and numerals in kindergarten, Barton said. Because of the increase in day care and preschool, many children are ready for such an academic setting. But some children are put into the educational system for other reasons, Blim said.

"Because of the expense of day care and parents who both work, some kids are enrolled in kindergarten who should be kept home," he said. "That's doing the wrong thing for the wrong reason."

'They become frustrated'

Wilson said that the theories behind pre-kindergarten and Transition to First Grade stem from the work of the late Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, regarded as a pioneer in the field of child development, and David Elkind, a psychology professor at Tufts University in Medford, Mass.

Piaget asserted in his teachings that if a concept is introduced to a child before he is ready to understand it, he may never be able to use the concept effectively.

Elkind has said that children who are pushed into academics before they are equipped to absorb the material develop a sense of failure that can lead to learning problems. Barton said that in Shawnee Mission, children whose first school experience is negative often have academic and behavior problems in later years.

"So much is expected so early," Barton said. "Sometimes they quit on us. They become frustrated, they're not organized, they don't do their work."

The district tests all children before they enter school to see if they are ready to handle a normal school setting. Teachers and administrators emphasized that although children placed in the program may be too young or immature for regular classes, they are not academically deficient.

"These kids are intellectually average or above," Converse said.

The decision to place a child in the program is left to the parents. Teachers say the parents have been very supportive.

Julie Griggs, whose daughter, Lisa, was in the Crestview T-1 class last year, said that Lisa was handling school better after the extra year.

"My daughter had just turned 5, and I wasn't sure she was ready for kindergarten, but I sent her anyway," she said. "The next year I thought she wasn't ready for first grade, and I wanted to put her back in kindergarten. Then they told me about this. She sailed right through it."

Griggs said she was not worried.

that her daughter had been, in effect, held back for a year.

"It didn't concern me at all," Griggs said. "I didn't want to push her through school just because some of her friends were going to first grade and she wasn't. Somewhere along the line . . . in third or fourth grade, she would have been held back because she wasn't progressing in kindergarten."

When those children are in regular classes, their inability to handle the curriculum often holds back the rest of the students, according to Cathy Siens, a T-1 teacher at Crestview.

Siens, who taught in a similar

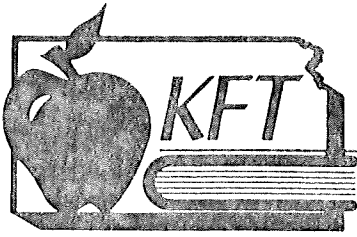
program in Oklahoma before coming to Shawnee Mission, got involved with the program there after a frustrating year teaching a regular first-grade class with many children who were not ready.

"It disrupted the class," she said. "You couldn't accomplish anything."

Things are much smoother when those children are removed from regular kindergarten and first-grade classes, she said.

"It makes a tremendous difference," Siens said. "When the young ones are not in class, you can cover so much more."

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KANSAS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
310 West Central/Suite 110 • Wichita, KS 67202 • (316) 262-5171

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 5052

Carolyn Kehr
Kansas Federation of Teachers

March 23, 1988

Madame Chairman, members of the House Education Committee, the Kansas Federation of Teachers agrees with Representative Ramirez in commending school districts which currently screen children for learning readiness prior to entry into school.

As teachers have known for years that students learn in different ways, so do they know that children develop cognitively at different rates. Just because a child may have reached the age at which he may enter school, it does not mean he/she is ready for that experience. Through the screening process, teachers and parents are provided the emotional, physical and social development information with which to make appropriate decisions concerning that child's entry into school and/or placement in specific activities within the educational system. The Gazelle Institute of Learning indicates in their studies of pre-school assessment findings that if a very bright child is not developmentally ready for a particular program, he will sacrifice his academic gifts in order to alleviate the frustration he feels in that situation.

As we encourage other school districts to participate in this screening process, it is appropriate to heed the advice of Rita Dunn, well-known learning styles researcher of St. John University in New York. Mrs. Dunn stresses the importance of qualifying the screening devices used by teaching to the strengths of the student first. After success has been reached then a child's weaknesses can be addressed with less frustration and with optimum learning success.

Again, the Kansas Federation of Teachers gladly supports Representative Ramirez and House Concurrent Resolution No. 5052.