

Approved: _____

4/11

Date

MINUTES OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barbara Lawrence at 9:00 a.m. on March 23, 1998 in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Committee staff present: Ben Barrett, Legislative Research Department
Carolyn Rampey, Legislative Research Department
Avis Swartzman, Revisor of Statutes
Jackie Breymeyer, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Karla Meggison, Kennedy Academy, Topeka
Tracee Nuttr, Teacher, Kennedy Academy, Topeka

Others attending: See attached list

Chairperson Lawrence called the meeting to order and stated the hearing on **SB 160--charter schools** would continue with Karla Meggison, owner, Kennedy Academy, Topeka, who had made a few comments on Friday, but was present to give more formal testimony today. (Attachment 1)

Ms. Meggison stated that she feels that the parents who send their children to her school and pay money to send their children to a private school would probably put them in a charter school if they had that option. They don't want to put their children in public school because they are looking for something a little different. They want more say into what goes on in the school system. In a charter school they probably would be able to do that. The people who send their children to the school are not wealthy. Some parents work two and three jobs to be able to afford to do this for their children.

Kennedy Academy is the only private non-parochial school in the State of Kansas. It is accredited by the State Board of Education. They thought it was important to put themselves under the authority of someone else in Kansas. They are under QPA now. It is an eleven month school, August 1 through June 30. They have had full-time kindergarten for twelve years. The students are tested at the beginning of the year and placed at a level according to what they know academically. They are not necessarily placed according to age; they are moved according to their academic skills. The school participates in the state assessments testing and the Iowa Basic Test of Skills. The school uses testing other than their own to keep track of progress. The two main reasons that people put their children in the school and pay the extra money is because they are placed academically and they have a lot more control over behavior. They do not keep behavioral problems. Most of the time it is the parent who gets kicked out of school, not the child.

Ms. Meggison stated that attending a charter school is a privilege. Everyone has the right to a free public education, but for people who want to do more, there should be something in the way of a charter school system. There are a lot of children that aren't being served by public education; they are falling through the cracks. There are three things that must happen for charter schools to succeed. There must be accountability; there must be autonomy, and good teachers must be rewarded and bad teachers removed. There is no room for tenure.

Ms. Meggison was asked how many teachers she has had to release because of poor performance. She responded that this has never happened. The people who come to work at her school do not come for the money. They are not paid that well. They are there because they want to be able to try new things.

Ms. Meggison was asked what kind of responsibilities over and above teaching do the teachers have. She responded that there are six teachers at the school. The teachers are in the process of doing QPA. There is a lot of paperwork and extra work to do with that. They are doing this on their own time. The teachers are in direct communication with the parents at all times. They do all the testing and set up the parent-teacher conferences. They are with the children and lunch and recess; they are with them all day long. They do their own curriculum and work as a team. The teacher who will get the students next year helps the teacher who has the students this year to make sure those students are at the level they should be academically.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ROOM 123-S-Statehouse, at 9:00 a.m. on March 23, 1998.

Asked on how the students do on testing, Ms. Meggison replied that they only had three students that needed to be tested at the time, because the school only goes to the sixth grade; this is the second year for sixth grade. They tested out pretty well on reading and math. This will be the first year for IOWA basics.

On parental involvement, Ms. Meggison responded that the parental involvement is good because they are paying for it. They are thinking about the kind of education their children are getting. They go out of their way to make sure the students are in a good environment. They have gotten a lot of students from public schools. Most of the students have had a lot of problems in public schools. They do not get the cream of the crop.

The Chairperson stated that follows the national trend. Most of the people who attend charter schools have not been successful in the public school.

Ms. Meggison stated that most of the students that have had problems in public schools do not have problems once they attend her school. On being asked why she thinks this is the case, she responded that she thinks it is the school. They work directly one on one with the parents. The parents are very involved at that point. They know that something has to be done. The maximum class size is sixteen. She has one class that only has three students.

The comment was made to Ms. Meggison that the public schools have to take everyone; they do not have the luxury of small classes.

Ms. Meggison responded to a question regarding her school by stating that it is a private, non-sectarian school, with the only source of funding being tuition; it is \$85 per week. This includes a hot lunch, all books and runs 48 weeks. She has three married and three single teachers. Some of them have two jobs. They do not want to babysit or police. The reason the teachers salaries are lower is because that is all the money there is, not because they do not deserve more or are not worth more.

Ms. Meggison was asked if she gets any children from the public school that are behind that are not home schooled or from other private schools; other children who haven't been able to make it in another venue. She replied that she does. She gave the example of a child who came to them that was fighting, flunking and 'bouncing off the wall'. She told the single parent the behavior policy and stated they would work with the child. They never had a problem with this child.

The discipline the school uses are standing in the corner, loss of recess, and timeouts. They also employ the money system. They start out with so much money and lose it for infringement of the rules.

Tracee Nuttr, a teacher at Kennedy Academy, appeared on the bill. She has worked at the Academy since it opened at several grade levels. She has seen parents bringing their children to the Academy as a last resort. She has seen wonderful things that they have been able to do with the students. The reason they have been able to do these things is because they have perks that public schools do not have. When there are smaller number of children in the classroom, they can become more familiar with the level the children are working at and hope that each reach his or her educational goal. She sees the parents of these children daily and she believes the daily contact with them helps tremendously. They do not see parents only at parent-teacher conferences; if there is a concern, it can be addressed immediately.

Ms. Nuttr stated that the things that have held them back are financial. Under charter school status the parents would not have to pay tuition. By making private schools eligible for public school status, they could provide the best of both worlds without putting a strain on the parents financially.

On being asked how much would the school be allowed to grow, Ms. Nutter responded one classroom per grade level.

One of the Committee members asked about the money that Ms. Meggison had mentioned previously. Ms. Nuttr replied that when the kids come in at the beginning of the school day they are given a list of things on the chalkboard that must be done before 8:45 a.m. If they get them done, they earn a dollar. Throughout the day they may earn twenty-five cents or a nickel. There is a fine for each broken rule. Several comments were added by different members of the Committee.

A member stated that there are three things a public school system could do: reduce class size; parental support and involvement and behavioral standards. Public school don't have the freedom to exclude students or reject them when they misbehave.

Ms. Nutter stated that the biggest hindrance a public school has is numbers. Flexibility comes from small numbers.

The Chairperson thanked the conferees for their testimony and adjourned the meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 24, 1998.

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE GUEST LIST

DATE: March 23, 1998

NAME	REPRESENTING
Craig Grant	HNEA
GERALD HENDERSON	USA of KS
Andy Kelly	KASB
Lee Chase	KNEA
Jacque Dabaz	SOE
Roger Toelke	Senator Hensley
Carrie Strahm	SHS
Dena Stucky	" "
Amie Moulds	Sabetha High School
Losica L. Dixon	Sabetha High School
Sara Grimm	Sabetha High School
Carmen Thompson	Sabetha High School
Herschel Poor	Bit.
Kim Bahr	USD #489
Chris Burnett	USD 301#
KA Med	Senate

My name is Karla Meggison and I am the owner of Kennedy Academy, a private school here in Topeka. I am interested in bill #160 because I feel that the people who send their children to my school are the same people who would be interested in sending their children to a Charter School, if the Charter School was allowed to operate the way this bill would allow them to operate.

The people who send their children to Kennedy Academy are just normal working class people. These aren't people who send their children to a private school because they think it's some kind of status statement. These are families where both parents work, they do without things sometimes to send their children to my school because their child's education is very important.

Kennedy Academy is the only private, non-parochial school in the State of Kansas that is accredited by the State Board of Education. We took that step because we felt that we should be under some type of controlling authority and also because it was important in helping our teachers keep their certificates current.

We are an 11- month school, we are in session from August 1 to June 30. We have had full time kindergarten for 12 years. Our students are tested when they first start and are placed at a level according to their academic skill, not age. They are put in a class of their peers, but they work pretty much at their own pace in math and Language Arts. We test our students four times a year to keep track of their progress. We also participate in State testing and the Iowa Basics testing.

I think the two main reasons that parents put their students in our school would be 1) for the academic standards and the fact that we move our students based on academic skill rather than age and 2) because we do not accept or keep behavior problems. (Either parents or students)

I feel that a Charter School should be able to do the same thing. Attending a Charter School should be a privilege, not a right. Everyone has the right to a free education and that can be obtained in a neighborhood school. But for those students and parents who are willing to work just a little harder and put forth just a little more effort, there should be some compensation and some way for them to achieve their goals without being held back by the various rules and regulations that public school has to labor under. I don't think

Senate Education
3-23-98
Attachment 1

there are probably a lot of changes that could be made in those rules and regulations because everyone does have the right to a free public education. But those very rules and regulations that help some people, hinder others from getting the best education the state can offer.

There are also some people who don't function well in regular classrooms who right now are falling through the cracks of public education that possibly could benefit from a different environment and rather than producing a failure, the public school system could help those people through Charter Schools.

But there are some things that are a must for the Charter Schools to succeed.

First – There needs to be accountability both in terms of academic success for the students and also in financial stability for the school.

Second – The school must have the autonomy it needs to function separately from any of the other public schools. The parents and staff of those schools should take the responsibility of running those schools. They should not be placed under all the same rules and regulations as public school.

Third – They must have the ability to reward good teachers and remove bad teachers from the classroom. Tenure has no place in the educational field. Good teachers will retain their positions simply because they are good teachers. But the schools must have the ability to rid themselves of bad teachers. Besides, Charter schools would be pretty much operated by the staff, rather than by some administration.