

Approved: 2-9-2000
Date

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Barbara Lawrence at 9:00 a.m. on January 20, 2000 in Room 313-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

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

Conferees appearing before the committee: Representative Kay O'Connor

Others attending: See Attached List

The meeting of the House and Senate Education committees was called to order by Representative Tanner, House Chairman. He called on Diane Gjerstad, Wichita Public Schools, who asked the committees if they would fill out a form that would allow the junior ROTC students from Wichita to spend Wednesday of next week shadowing them to learn the legislative process.

Chairman Tanner called on Representative O'Connor to present her education plan.

Representative O'Connor distributed a press release dated November 23, 1999, that she had sent to all legislators (Attachment 1). She had requested and received input from several legislators. She went through the plan and expounded on each of the ten points of the program and stood for questions.

Chairperson Lawrence asked Representative O'Connor if she was going to introduce legislation that could be debated in committee.

Representative O'Connor stated that although she has several bills that she has already introduced and is involved with these bills, if there is enough interest, she would be happy to introduce all or any part of her ten-point plan as legislation. She feels, though, that the bills would have a better chance of being heard if they were introduced as committee bills.

Chairman Tanner told Representative O'Connor that she could have the bills drawn up and brought to committee to be introduced as committee bills.

In discussing the point on Charter Schools, Chairperson Lawrence stated that some charters went unfilled for three years because people were not privy to the fact that federal money was available.

Several comments on legislation that could be introduced resulted in Chairman Tanner responding that there will be legislation introduced on teacher preparation and teaching as a second career. Alternative teacher certification was discussed, with the point being made by several members that there is a definite lack of teachers in certain fields of expertise. The time may come when this means of filling educational needs may have to be employed more often.

Dale Dennis, Deputy Education Commissioner, stated that most people will get their certification in three years. A plan must be filed, with the university evaluating it. Usually a person who is seeking certification will attend college in the spring and fall, with additional hours needed picked up in the summer.

Another area discussed in Representative O'Connor's plan was lowering the mandatory school attendance age. Several comments were made for and against this point. Representative O'Connor stated she sympathized with the child who is having a troubled student life, but also sympathizes with those other students who must be in the classroom with that child.

After several additional comments, the meeting was adjourned.

REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT 14
STATE CAPITOL—431-N
TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1504
(785) 296-7683
HOME ADDRESS:
1101 N. CURTIS
OLATHE, KS 66061
(913) 764-7935
FAX (913) 764-4492
E-MAIL: kayoisok@msn.com



TOPEKA

KAY O'CONNOR
STATE OF KANSAS REPRESENTATIVE
NORTHERN OLATHE

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
EDUCATION
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION & ELECTIONS
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

DURING SESSION
HOTLINE—1-800-432-3924
TTY 913-296-8430
KC AREA LOCAL CALL 782-5000

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release
November 23, 1999

In response to the Senator Dick Bond 10-point education plan, State Representative Kay O'Connor has issued the following 10-point education plan. It has been sent to all current legislators with request for input.

It is her hope that supporters will be found at the grassroots level as well as the legislative level for her proposals. Legislation will be introduced accordingly.

1. **BAN SOCIAL PROMOTION:** Students who have not met their grade level expectations should not be moved to a higher level grade as if everything is just fine and dandy. The fear of wounding someone's self-esteem is far outweighed by the resulting dumbing down of grades so that the expectation of all students is lowered to accommodate those that are not making the grade. For those students who are unable to complete needed course work during the summer months, they should be required to repeat the grade.
2. **SCHOOL UNIFORMS OPTION:** This is an issue that can evoke fiery emotions in the quietest of schools. There are good arguments on both sides of this issue. Without "home rule" for local schools, which legislation continues to flounder, the legislature should at least pass a law giving permission for local schools to choose school uniforms if this option is not already allowed.
3. **SEX EDUCATION OPT IN INSTEAD OF OPT OUT:** Under current law, if a student loses his "permission slip" on the way home to his parents, he is in the sex education class. The law should be the other way around. Without the "permission slip" the student should be out of the sex education class. This is called, "opt in instead of opt out." Parental permission should not only be for sex education classes, but also for any class that might tend to be controversial.
4. **SCHOOL BUILDING REPORT CARD AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC:** Kansas, according to the State Board of Education, has a school building report card. However, it is apparently not readily available to the public. Parents of children should be able to see these report cards in order to make an informed choice about where they wish to have their child schooled. Poorly performing schools should not be protected from scrutiny. Schools performing well should be allowed to let their shiny buttons show.
5. **LOCAL SCHOOL BUILDING MANAGEMENT:** The principal of each school building is in the best position to know which teachers are performing well and which are not. It should be the principal of each school building that makes the final decision about who teaches in his school. A teacher contract should not be finalized unless a building principal is willing to accept the teacher in his school building. Of course, appeals can still be brought before the board in the usual manner.

Senate Education
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Attachment 1

6. **CHARTER SCHOOLS ALSO APPROVED BY STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION OR BOARD OF REGENTS:** Under current law all charter schools are under the approval/direction of a local school board. There is no incentive for a local school board to approve any charter school perceived by them as competition for students in their district. Many of the current charter schools are for "at risk" students which may just become a dumping ground for poorly performing students in a local school district. This could, of course, drive up performance measurements for the district if the at risk students in the charter school were not counted.
7. **LOWER MANDATORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AGE:** "Sixteen, 17, and 18, year olds who don't want to be in school can cause a lot of trouble," Attorney General Carla Stovall recently said to a group of legislators at an interim meeting. She also said that teachers have told her they would like to see the state's mandatory school attendance law, which requires students to attend school until they are 18, repealed or amended.

When I completed the 8th grade in Alaska where I attended our local public school, I chose to go on to the 9th grade and complete high school. When I was in the 10th grade, I saw a number of my 8th grade classmates now attending the 9th grade. You see, by Alaska law, although this was allowed, on their own these students had realized the error of their ways. Not being in school for a year taught them the hard lesson of what a future of low-income might really be, and the real value of more education. They also missed many of their classmate friends.

The State of Kansas should not make teachers be jailers or babysitters for students who do not want to be in their classroom. Students should want to be in the classroom. The teacher should be able to excuse 16, 17, & 18-year-old students who, by their behavior, are a detriment to the classroom.

I would recommend the mandatory age be 15 or satisfactory completion of the 9th grade.

8. **TAX CREDITS FOR PRIVATE BENEFACTORS WHO PROVIDE FINANCIAL HELP FOR SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS OR SCHOLARSHIPS, AND TAX CREDITS FOR NON-REIMBURSED CLASSROOM EXPENSES FOR PUBLIC AND NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLTEACHERS:** The cost of these tax credits does not have to cost the taxpayers any new dollars. Kansas currently has a \$5,000,000 set aside for approved social programs. All of the above should certainly qualify as approved social programs.
9. **SCHOOL VOUCHERS FOR LOW-INCOME INNER CITY STUDENTS:** I still support a statewide voucher program as I have continued to introduce for the past six years. However, a number of individuals seem to think that a pilot program would at least benefit those most in need of assistance in finding good schools. Some of these students are in emergency situations. Threats of violence, poor test scores, and drug infestation are certainly problems that need immediate attention. The State of Kansas should not be in the business of sacrificing children on the altar of waiting for inner city schools to improve themselves. Let those children that are able, find something that they believe is better. We must not deny them even this small hope for improvement.

The bill can easily be written so that no additional tax dollars will be needed from the taxpayers and not one good public school will lose a penny of current funding.

10. **ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION:** We often hear of teacher shortages in certain fields. Under Kansas's current law, Albert Einstein and Thomas Edison would not be qualified to teach science in our schools. Neither Elvis Presley nor Fred Astaire would be qualified to teach music or dance in our schools. A retired engineer, geologist, banker, doctor, carpenter, or auto mechanic would likewise be disqualified. All of the above would have to go college to get a teaching certificate. Again, I would like to see local school building management that would allow a principal to make this decision with the approval of their local school board.

Representative O'Connor can be reached for question or comment at 913-393-1991 or 913-764-7935.