

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Dwayne Umbarger at 1:30 p.m. on January 17, 2001 in Room 123-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
 Judy Steinlicht, Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Others attending: See attached list

Chairman Umbarger introduced Ben Barrett to brief the committee on reports by the Special Committee on Preschool and K-12 Matters.

The first report was titled "Student Retention As One Alternative to Social Promotion" (Attachment 1). It was the conclusion of the committee that no action should be taken on this issue until the Legislature receives from the State Board of Education a report on the planning for implementing SB432 concerning mastering basic skills in reading in grades K-3.

The second report, "Early Childhood Education Issues", (Attachment 2). The study focused on three specific early childhood education areas, Parents as Teachers, four-year-old at-risk children's programs and full-day kindergarten. The conferees in general endorsed these programs and supported program expansion except one conferee was not supporting the full day kindergarten unless it was fully optional. The research also generally supported the effectiveness of these types of programs.

In this case, the committee is submitting the legislation to expand its application of the parent education program more commonly know as Parents as Teachers to the children from birth to age 4. Currently this program serves children from birth to age 3. The committee also recommended that the Senate Ways & Means Committee and the House Appropriations Committee consider increasing funding of this program with the objective of eliminating waiting lists for program participation.

The meeting was opened for questions. Concern was expressed about expanding the Parents-as-Teachers (PAT) program to 3 years olds when there are still districts that do not have the PAT program for birth to 3 year olds. The program was originally designed to be statewide and fully funded. Now that matching funds are required, some poorer districts don't have it. We have statistics that this program works, why not follow through with funds to get this program statewide as originally intended before we go on to expand the program to three year olds. Response was that there may be some issues besides the funding. Some districts may not have chosen the program as a high priority. It was felt that the testimony of people with active programs could not be ignored. These districts wanted the flexibility to decide which 3 and 4 years olds needed to stay on the program. These people are the experts who know which of these kids cannot be rolled off the program without some severe consequences. The other issue is how to structure the program so that districts can afford it and also see it as a priority.

Another comment was that the biggest issue was money, but since the committee had determined that there really was a big gap in the program between 3 and 5 year olds, the committee should be concerned about not expanding the PAT program to 3 and 4 year olds. Presently there are no programs for 3 year olds and limited programs for 4 year olds.

One member of the committee requested additional information on the research done on the all-day kindergarten program. It is a very expensive program and concern is that much of the day may be taken up in recess, naps and social development with very little academic material presented. Information

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presented to the committee indicated that the students who have not gone to all-day kindergarten tend to catch up with those who have within six months.

Back to the PAT program, one member of the committee wanted to know if the program was as beneficial to wealthy parents as to lower income families. The response was that we have parents at the top income level that are uninvolved with raising children because of their work loads, but we also have the same dilemma at the low income levels because both parents are working and are perhaps disenfranchised with raising children. This program was never economically based.

What about a program known as "Tiny K"? This program is under Health and Environment and the committee raised the question that perhaps it is time to ask the for the program to be put under the Education Committee so that there can be some coordination. Mr Barrett agreed to look into the possibility of transferring this program to the Education Committee.

The third study was on "Student Assessments". (Attachment 3) The Committee recommends legislation urged by the State Board of Education to increase from three to five years the mandatory schedule for review by the State Board of the specified curriculum standards. A five-year cycle will be less disruptive and less expensive than the current system.

A Motion was made by Senator Vratil to introduce one conceptual bill, #1rs0275, AN ACT enacting the KAN-ED act; providing for establishment and maintenance of a broadband technology-based network for certain schools, libraries and hospitals. Seconded by Senator Corbin. Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Umbarger. The next meeting is at 1:30, January 18, 2001.

Special Committee on Preschool and K-12 Matters

STUDENT RETENTION AS ONE ALTERNATIVE TO SOCIAL PROMOTION

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, the decision regarding retention of a child at grade level is a local school district determination. While school districts retain a few students each year, their principal commitment is to intervention and support strategies that will assist individual students to achieve the district's learning goals and objectives. The state's school accreditation program, state assessments, and the increased state policy focus on early childhood education initiatives evidence state policy makers' commitment to assist school districts in meeting the needs of underperforming children.

The Committee recommends that no action be taken on the issues of student retention and social promotion at least until after the 2001 Legislature receives the State Board of Education's report on the planned implementation of 2000 SB 432 pertaining to mastery of basic skills in reading in grades K-3. After that time, members of the Legislature will be better positioned to judge whether other state level initiatives are needed.

Proposed Legislation: None.

BACKGROUND

The study topic was proposed in the March 28, 2000, report to the Senate Education Committee of that Committee's Subcommittee on School Reform. The Subcommittee had reviewed this topic along with several other issues that were components of school reform proposals that had been presented to the 2000 Legislature by House and Senate members.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Overview. The Committee reviewed research findings on implications of the practice of retaining failing students at grade level or, alternatively, promoting

them to the next grade level and received testimony from representatives of five school districts and three education interest groups on practices for responding to the needs of failing students. The Committee also heard from the State Department of Education regarding how school districts address the needs of failing students through the reporting requirements of the state's school accreditation process and concerning the status of the State Board's implementation of the 2000 SB 432 mandate that the Board develop a strategy for mastery of basic reading skills in grades K-3.

Conferees. Conferees included a member of the State Board of Education and a State Department of Education staff

member; spokespersons for Shawnee Mission (USD 512), Auburn Washburn (USD 437), Southeast of Saline (USD 306), Parsons (USD 503), and Wichita (USD 259); and representatives of the Kansas National Education Association, Kansas Association of School Boards, and United School Administrators (written testimony only).

General Discussion. The issue of student retention versus social promotion is decades old. What varies most about it is the relative prominence it commands on the public education agenda. Generally, “retention” is defined as the practice of requiring low-performing students to repeat the same grade in order to master at least some of what has not been learned, and “social promotion” is defined as the practice of promoting students to the next grade even when they have failed sufficient mastery of grade-level curriculum.

A 1998 National Research Council Study noted that nearly 20 percent of American students have been held back at some point in their childhood. The retention rate was particularly high among Blacks and Hispanics with nearly 50 percent having repeated the same grade at some point in their education.

Highly summarized, research findings on this issue suggest that neither the singular act of retaining underperforming students at grade level nor promoting them produces desirable education results. A 1999 publication of the U.S. Department of Education contained the following statement:

With pressure increasing to hold students accountable for performance and end social promotion, and research pointing to negative findings related to retention, edu-

cators may feel that they have few choices. The results of both policies are unacceptably high dropout rates, especially for poor and minority students, and inadequate knowledge and skills for students. Neither practice closes the learning gap for low-achieving students, and neither practice is an appropriate response to the academic needs of students who have not mastered required course work.

After reaching the conclusion that neither retention nor social promotion represents sound policy, the literature focuses on strategies designed to attack problems that are believed to contribute to failure of a child to make satisfactory progress in school. Generally, these strategies address such things as early childhood literacy, more time devoted to assisting underperforming students, reduced class size in the primary grades, clearly articulated expectations of all affected parties (children, families, teachers and other school personnel), improved teacher skills, and various school accountability measures.

State Board of Education. Staff of the State Department of Education, commenting that the State Board has no policy directly affecting the issue of student retention or social promotion, explained the way in which the Quality Performance Accreditation system contributes to the goal of satisfactory student progress. It was noted that the accreditation process does not support the practice of social promotion of students. Schools are required to develop profiles of data that describe student performance. This informs the school staff of areas in the instructional program in which improvement is needed. Each school must develop a school improvement plan that targets three curricular areas for improve-

ment of student learning. Reading and mathematics have been the areas upon which the State Board of Education has placed the greatest emphasis. Each school must use at least three measures of its success in improving student performance. Also, the State Board asks schools to develop improvement plans for students who are performing at the unsatisfactory level on the state assessments. Each school is visited by an external team to examine information the school provides and to make a recommendation on the school's accreditation status. The recommendation is based on an analysis of student performance. Schools that fail to obtain the desired student results are potential candidates for denial of state accreditation.

The State Board of Education's recommendations for addressing the issue of student retention and social promotion focused mainly on the Board's school finance recommendations to the Governor and the 2001 Legislature that pertain to early childhood initiatives, such as expanding the parent education and four-year-old at-risk student programs and supporting full-day kindergarten programs. The principal exception is the Board's proposal to provide state aid for summer school programs. This recommendation is that the school finance law be amended to include the preceding summer school's students in the school district's September 20 enrollment count in the form of an add-on weight based on the proportionate amount of time the student spent in the summer program. Summer school students counted in the school finance formula would be those who had not met state or local academic performance standards. The State Board estimated that the additional FY 2002 cost to the state of implementing this recommendation would be about \$24.0 million.

School District Spokespersons—Overview. School district representatives reported that each year they may retain a very small number of students at grade level. They noted retention mainly is an elementary or middle school issue, as, at the high school level, progress is based on units of credit earned. The conferees explained that most of their efforts are directed toward strategies to prevent student failure and to support their success in school. Examples of such strategies supported by state legislation are the Parent Education program, commonly referred to as "Parents as Teachers" or "PAT," the four-year-old at-risk competitive grant program, and the "at-risk" weight included in the school finance formula. The school district representatives explained that they have specific strategies directed to student needs at all school age levels.

School Districts—Some Specific Observations. A representative of the Shawnee Mission school district explained that the district always seeks to obtain parental support and agreement in determining whether to retain a child because, without that support, retention has little chance of being successful. In that district, the retention rate is in the range of 0.0025 percent per year. Shawnee Mission has a rigorous instructional program that focuses on basic reading and mathematics skills. Several individualized support options are available to students who have difficulties in these areas to help them achieve mastery. Among others, Shawnee Mission's intervention strategies include School-within-a-School for middle school students, Alternative Education Program for students in grades 7-12, New Beginnings Program for students under long term suspension or who have been expelled, and summer school programs.

The Auburn Washburn superintendent reviewed several of that district's initiatives directed at helping all children to succeed. At the high school level, the Flex schedule, which has the objective of helping students to use their time more wisely and reducing dropouts, has been implemented. A Teacher Guided Assistance initiative provides special teacher assistance to high school students during their "unscheduled time" to help those who are having difficulty with some of their course work. The district also operates an alternative high school. At the middle school level, the Personal Academic Strategies for Success (PASS) program aids students who are failing in language arts and mathematics classes. There is a summer school program for grades K-12 which is designed to assist students who have not mastered course outcomes. A unique feature of this program is that children attend only until they have mastered the outcome needed, whether that be one day or the full four weeks. This year, a three half-day intercession program will be conducted to assist children in grades 3 and 6. There also is a pilot tutorial program at two elementary schools designed to provide additional help to struggling 3-6 graders in mathematics and reading.

The superintendent of the Southeast of Saline school district described steps that are followed leading up to a retention decision. This process includes preparation of a student improvement plan that is implemented and evaluated as preliminary steps in this process. Also, summer school is used at the elementary and junior high levels to help students who are having problems during the regular school year.

The superintendent of the Parsons school district identified a number of programs at all grade levels designed to

ensure additional help for students who are behind academically. Most of these programs are supported by federal funds. The Parsons Learning Academy, an alternative school, is a major initiative designed to help high school students to succeed in school. At the middle school, the Alternative Enrichment Center helps struggling students prepare to return to a regular classroom setting. There also are after school tutoring, summer school, and academic enrichment program opportunities available for students. Student Improvement Teams, composed of various school district personnel, deal with various problems faced individually by students. At the elementary school level, full-day kindergarten programs are provided for students who are behind. A K-1 placement is used to help some children make the transition into the regular school program. In these instances, the student attends kindergarten in the morning and the first grade in the afternoon. In the following year, the student enters school as a first grader. The Reading Recovery program is used in the first grade. Federally funded Title I teachers provide small group instruction in reading and math in the early grades. For 20 weeks each year there is a one hour, three days per week after-school program which provides activities in a variety of areas such as art, reading, Spanish, science, sports, games, computers, and tutoring. For grades 3-6, there is the Academic Improvement Room that operates after school for one hour four days per week that provides an opportunity for students to work on homework with the help of an adult supervisor. Peer and adult tutoring opportunities also are provided. The Jump Start program provides refresher classes in reading and mathematics during the three week period in August before school commences for children who need the extra help.

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Representatives of the Wichita school district explained that the district has clearly sequenced grade and subject instructional and learning objectives and that children are held accountable for their performance. The Wichita Board of Education has implemented benchmark assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics, in grades 2, 5, 8, and 10. The Board also has directed intervention programs at every school to help students needing additional assistance to pass the assessments. The principal strategy for intervention programs to provide assistance to students in order to enable them to pass the tests is based on more time—a restructured school day, extended school day, and extended school year. The focus of the intervention is on the specific needs of individual students, with the program directed mainly toward reading, writing, and mathematics. The presumption is one of considerable flexibility in staff and resources deployment to meet those needs. All intervention programs are expected to involve close communication and cooperation with parents. Measurements are used to determine progress in meeting the learning objectives. Staff development is an important component of the comprehensive school district intervention strategy.

Education Organizations. The spokesperson for the Kansas Association of School Boards said that the state should not attempt to write laws or policies regarding student promotion and retention. In any event, such an effort would be futile as it is impossible to address every individual circumstance in a single statute. The spokesperson emphasized that these decisions should continue to be made by teachers, parents, principals, and school boards. The Kansas Association of School Boards representative observed that the way to address the problem of students falling

behind grade level is to provide districts the resources to give these students extra help. It was suggested that increased state funding for summer school programs and at-risk or underperforming students would help.

The Kansas National Education Association spokesperson explained that, in most instances, retention as a means of getting children to attain rigorous standards will not work. The spokesperson said there is a correlation between being overage for grade and dropping out of high school. Children who are behind academically need and deserve extra opportunities to meet standards, and school districts need to provide opportunities that meet the needs of the child who has fallen behind. The Kansas National Education Association believes that opportunities such as alternative educational programs, extended day and year programs, and remediation and tutoring ought to be available and are appropriate to satisfy the intentions of those who demand that promotion be based upon meeting a set of academic standards or passing a test. Bringing parents, teachers, and administrators together as a team focused on the child's improvement is a good idea. This can be accomplished now, and requires no legislation.

The Executive Director of the United School Administrators submitted information which explained the organization has no statement about social promotion. This is because the organization believes that local education professionals understand the needs of individual students and can best make recommendations about placement of the child. It was noted, for example, that in the school districts there may be found strategies such as multi-age groupings, extended school day and school year programs, and alternative schools.

Status of SB 432. By enactment of SB 432, the 2000 Legislature directed the State Board of Education to prepare a strategy to identify, develop, and implement a Mastery of Basic Reading Skills program in kindergarten and each of grades 1-3. This directive is based upon the goal of mastery of basic reading skills by pupils upon completion of the third grade. The State Board of Education will report to the 2001 Legislature a strategy and proposed plan for implementing the program, including estimates of the cost to the state for doing so. Standards will be developed during the 2001-02 school year and the plan will be implemented in the 2002-03 school year. Staff of the State Board of Education reported that a planning committee has been appointed to assist the Board in carrying out its responsibilities under the law. This committee is recommending to the State Board the development of three documents during the next two years—one containing standards, one for monitoring progress, and one for professional development. To accomplish this, the planning committee is recommending that three committees of approximately 27 members each be created. The assumption is that each committee will meet 10 to 12 times. Staff of the State Department of Education will work with the three committees to implement the plan. Currently, the proposal is for \$245,000 in FY 2002 and \$125,000 in FY 2003 to support this activity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, the decision regarding retention of a child at grade level is a local school district determination. Testi-

mony demonstrated that, while school districts retain a few students each year, their principal commitment is to intervention and support strategies that will assist individual students to achieve the district's learning goals and objectives. School districts are doing this in very creative ways in accord with their perceived needs. The Committee recognizes that anecdotal evidence suggests there is a public perception that social promotion is too commonplace and that student retention too seldom occurs. Unfortunately, there are no state level data that may be used by the public for evaluating the accuracy of these views. The Committee received no empirical data bearing on this matter that would assist in making a judgment thereon.

The Committee notes that the state's school accreditation program; state assessments; increased state policy focus on early childhood education initiatives; and legislation, such as 2000 SB 432, all are evidence of state policy makers' commitment to assist school districts to identify and meet the needs of underperforming children.

Based upon the information it has reviewed, the Committee recommends that the Legislature take no action on the matters of student retention and social promotion at least until after the 2001 Legislature receives the State Board of Education's report on the planned implementation of 2000 SB 432 pertaining to mastery of basic skills in reading in grades K-3. After that time, members of the Legislature will be better positioned to judge whether any other state level initiatives are needed.

Special Committee on Preschool and K-12 Matters

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ISSUES

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee assembled excellent information about the status of state policy initiatives in the area of preschool and early childhood education.

The Committee singled out the Parent Education program, more commonly known as Parents as Teachers (PAT), for its effectiveness and for the widespread support it commands. Financial constraints drive many school districts to face difficult choices about programs to be supported, downsized, or eliminated. In this context, decisions about maintaining or expanding PAT programs are made more difficult by the local funds matching requirement that the Legislature traditionally has imposed through appropriation action. The Committee proposes legislation to expand application of the PAT program to children from birth to age four (current limit is age 3). The Committee also recommends that during the 2001 Legislative Session the Ways and Means Committee of the Senate and the Appropriations Committee of the House consider increasing the funding for this program with the objective of eliminating waiting lists for program participation.

The Committee also recommends that members of the Legislature, especially members of the Senate and House Education Committees, remain abreast of new information being generated by the early brain development research work. It is exceedingly important for legislators to devote their efforts to fashioning the state policies needed to take advantage of this new knowledge.

Proposed Legislation: The Committee recommends one bill on this topic.

BACKGROUND

The issues contained in this study topic were proposed in the March 28, 2000, report to the Senate Education Committee of that Committee's Subcommittee on School Reform. The subcommittee had reviewed these topics along with several other issues that were components of school reform proposals that

had been presented to the 2000 Legislature by various House and Senate members.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Overview. The principal activity of the Committee was to review and gather data regarding three specific early childhood education areas:

- Parent Education programs (commonly referred to as Parents as Teachers or PAT).
- Four-year-old at-risk children programs.
- Full-day kindergartens.

Conferees. Conferees represented the State Department and State Board of Education; Education Commission of the States; school districts and school district consortiums, including Leavenworth (USD 453), DeSoto (USD 232), Belle Plaine (USD 357), Lawrence (USD 497), Newton (USD 373), Beloit (USD 273), and Kansas City Area Parents as Teachers; Rainbows United (Wichita–Early Childhood Accelerated Program); Head Start Association; and Kansas Children’s Cabinet.

The Committee also received two specific financing recommendations jointly presented by the Kansas Association of School Boards, Kansas National Education Association, and United School Administrators. These organizations emphasized that reaching the goal for public education of helping all students to achieve success requires changes in the system and, necessarily, a greater commitment of resources.

Brain Research. The Education Commission of the States conferee presented information drawn from research on brain development in the early years. The research suggests enormous implications of this information for child development, child care, and early childhood education initiatives. The conferee stressed the critical importance for publicly-sponsored early childhood development initiatives to integrate to the greatest extent practicable the knowledge

produced by brain research science.

Kansas Children's Cabinet—Selected FY 2002 Funding Recommendations.

The Executive Director of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet presented the Cabinet’s FY 2002 funding recommendations from the Children’s Initiatives Fund. Of some \$40.0 million of recommended expenditures, \$2.5 million is for programs administered by the State Department of Education that are the subject of this study topic: Parent Education, \$1.5 million and Four-year-old At-Risk Program, \$1.0 million. A total of \$1.125 million is proposed for three other programs administered by the State Department of Education: Violence Prevention Project (\$0.5 million), Communities in Schools (\$125,000), and Mentoring (\$0.5 million.)

Parents as Teachers (PAT). The PAT program, which recognizes parents as the first and most important teachers of their children, is designed to provide information and support to parents to help them maximize their child’s development from birth through the first few years of the child’s life. The PAT program, developed in Missouri and implemented widely among the states, is premised upon voluntary family participation. It is not targeted to any specific demographic. A goal is for the program to serve all first-time parents, but all families are eligible to participate. There is a research base affirming the long-term benefits of the program.

The Kansas PAT program has been in operation since the 1990-91 school year. In accord with the legislation that created it, the program provides services to children from the time of birth to age three. State funding for the program in FY 2001 totals \$6.1 million. The 228 school districts that participate in the program

serve about 17,000 children. These school districts have about 3,900 children on service waiting lists. A 1997 research project involving 17 Kansas school districts produced these observations about effects of this program:

- PAT children demonstrated significantly more aspects of positive social development than did comparison children.
- PAT children were significantly more advanced than the comparison children in intellectual and language development.
- PAT parents were more knowledgeable about child-rearing practices and child development than were comparison parents.
- PAT children performed well, regardless of socio-economic disadvantages and other traditional risk factors.
- PAT parents were more likely to regard their school districts as responsive to their children's needs.
- Ninety-nine percent of responding PAT parents reported a high degree of satisfaction with all project services, with home visits being identified as the most valuable.

The State Department of Education reported that there is substantial and continuing evidence that inequities in preschool opportunities contribute to the achievement gap for students at risk of school failure. The State Board of Education has developed a series of recommendations to the Governor and 2001 Legislature that urge expansion of all of the existing early childhood education initiatives—PAT, four-year-old at-risk

students, and full-time kindergarten. The Board's recommendation for the PAT program is to replace the categorical state aid funding method, which currently features a 65.0 percent local match, with a pupil weight of 0.2 full-time equivalent enrollment under the general school finance program. The State Board believes this change would facilitate expansion of the program both as to the number of districts that participate and the number of children served by current programs. The State Board believes that elimination of the specific local match requirement would remove a significant barrier to program implementation and expansion. The State Board estimates state costs under this recommendation would increase from \$6.1 million in FY 2001 to about \$14.7 million in FY 2002.

School district conferees were unanimous in their strong support for the program. While emphasizing the need to expand PAT to all eligible children, the conferees noted that there is a gap in services that needs attention. The conferee from the Leavenworth school district explained that the Legislature's reduction this year in the local matching requirement from 75.0 percent to 65.0 percent had helped that district expand its services from 250 families to 300 families. In Kansas, participation in the state-supported PAT program is limited to children under three years of age. Thus, three and four-year-old children are without services. A few three year-olds and some four year-olds receive services in Head Start programs or, in the case of four year-olds, in the state-funded four-year-old at-risk student program. This means that there really is very little support available for children who are three years old. Recommendations were that school districts be permitted to use some of the 0 to age 3 funding for three and

four-year-old children or, in the alternative, that the PAT program be made available to children to age five.

Four-year-old At-Risk Program and Head Start. The state's four-year-old at-risk program became an element of the school finance formula for the first time in the 1998-99 school year. The 1998 Legislature approved funding for a half-day educational program for 1,350 four-year-old at-risk children. The state cost of this program was estimated to be \$3.0 million. The program was expanded by \$1.0 million for the 1999-2000 school year and by another \$1.0 million for the 2000-01 school year. In 2000-01, the program is expected to serve 2,230 children. This is a competitive grant program which uses the federal Head Start participation guidelines to determine which children qualify as being "at-risk." The State Board of Education uses its *Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education* as a resource in evaluating funding applications. These standards are consistent with those of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The federal Head Start program has been operating in Kansas since 1965. The program has served children ages three through five, but due to federal funding priorities it mainly has served four year-olds. Presently, there are 29 Head Start programs that annually serve some 7,000 children and families. As a result of brain research demonstrating the importance of early intervention, the Early Head Start program was created in 1994. In 1998, Kansas became the first state in the nation to create a state-federal partnership to fund early childhood development through Head Start. In accord with current federal funding levels, it is mostly four year-olds who are served in the regular Head Start program.

Head Start is intended to provide a quality early childhood educational opportunity to help prepare participating children for success in school. Teachers in the program must be certified in early childhood education or elementary education. Each program must provide:

- Cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical, cultural, and aesthetic development through developmentally appropriate early childhood education.
- A broad range of services to support the education of the child, including transportation, nutrition, social services, health, and counseling.
- Coordination with other preschool programs.
- Preparation for success in kindergarten.
- Involvement of parents in supporting the educational growth of their children.

The State Department of Education's initial evaluation of the state's four-year-old at-risk programs suggests that they have had a positive impact on school readiness. Conferees described their efforts at fund raising and coordination of these programs and concurred in the program's positive results. The Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association cited research confirming the high quality of Head Start programs and their positive impact on children they have served. Conferees were in agreement that the four-year-old at-risk program should be expanded so that all such children can be served by either the state or federal program.

The State Department of Education estimates that about 10,000 of 35,000 four year-olds in the state would meet one or more of the at-risk criteria. Currently, Head Start and special education serve about 4,500 of these children. About 5,500 children remain who could be served by the four-year-old at-risk program if it were fully funded and implemented. As about 2,230 of these children currently are being served, some 3,270 more children would receive services if the program were fully implemented. Under the current funding mechanism, the additional cost to the state for full implementation would be about \$7.5 million. The State Board of Education is joined by the Kansas Association of School Boards, Kansas National Education Association, and United School Administrators along with other organizations who are members of the School Finance Coalition in recommending full implementation of this program.

One conferee presented information about Rainbows United's unique pre-school program for three-and four-year-old children who have potential for being identified as gifted in academic and arts areas. This program began in 1998 as a two year pilot project at Wichita USD 259's McCollom Elementary School. It was reported to be a "first in the nation" experiment. The program intends to provide high ability children an accelerated but developmentally appropriate integrated curriculum that addresses both their intellectual and emotional needs. The program recognizes that highly gifted children represent a population that can be placed at risk of school failure or alienation as a result of factors such as misidentification, inappropriate grade placement, or exposure to inadequate curriculum.

Full-Day Kindergarten. The State Department of Education reported that, during the 1999-2000 school year, 172 Kansas public schools offered full-day kindergarten and enrolled a total of about 7,300 such children. Department staff said that, even though prior year data have not been compiled, it is certain there has been an expansion in the number of full-day kindergartens provided. Under the school finance plan, kindergarten pupils are counted in a district's enrollment as 0.5 full-time equivalent pupils, regardless of whether they attend a half day or full day program.

The State Board of Education is recommending to the Governor and to the 2001 Legislature that children who participate in a full-day kindergarten program be counted at 1.0 full-time equivalent pupil under the school finance plan. The State Board estimates that, if such a change were made, approximately 75.0 percent of the pupils would attend kindergarten full time in the first year and that participation would increase to nearly 100.0 percent over the next three to five years. The State Board estimates this proposal would require an increase in state funding of about \$52.5 million in the 2001-02 school year. State Department of Education staff cited information indicating that 15 states require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten. Five of those states also require half-day classes. Four of the states reported that student attendance at kindergarten is mandatory.

The Kansas Association of School Boards, Kansas National Education Association, and United School Administrators explained that they agree with other

organizations in the School Finance Coalition in their support of this recommendation of the State Board of Education.

Two conferees representing school districts expressed their support for optional full-day kindergarten programs while a parent from Wamego, who did not view full-day kindergarten as desirable for her children, said that if the full-day kindergarten option were provided, it truly should be optional. She emphasized that individual readiness to attend a full-day of kindergarten is a key consideration and that not all five-year old children are developmentally ready for a full-day program. She said other parents she has talked to express the view that, in order to avoid burnout and a dislike for school, children should be given more time "just to be kids" and to engage in activities that better suit their developmental stage. The conferee expressed the opinion that several parents she knows will hold their children out of school for a full year rather than enroll them in a full-day kindergarten. It is the quality of education and not beginning school early or providing a longer kindergarten day that better prepares pupils to do well in the primary grades.

Research information presented to the Committee on the half-day versus full-day kindergarten issue was somewhat inconclusive, although it tended to support the effectiveness of full-day programs that are developmentally appropriate, indicating such programs generally have academic and behavioral benefits, perhaps more so for at-risk children. The research also emphasizes that the length of the school day is only one dimension of the kindergarten experience. Other important issues include the nature of the curriculum and the quality of teaching.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An important function of the Committee was to gather information about the principal state initiatives in the area of preschool education and about policy directions that require priority legislative attention. The information gathering mission was an unqualified success. The Committee reviewed excellent materials that described the purposes of programs and initiatives included in the Committee's study charge, status of these programs in Kansas school districts, research on the effects of such programs, and samples of field-based program implementation.

In the end, the Committee singled out the PAT program for its effectiveness and for the widespread support it commands. A recurrent concern expressed by conferees was that of the increasing number of children who come to school inadequately prepared for that environment. The Committee's view is that the PAT program materially affects child-rearing activities in the earliest stages of the child's development, and, consequently, contributes toward producing healthy, well-adjusted children who will be ready to join their peers in school programs. It was noted that, due to financial constraints, many school districts face very difficult choices about programs to be supported, to be downsized, or even to be eliminated. In this context, decisions about maintaining or expanding PAT programs are made more difficult by the local matching funds requirement that the Legislature traditionally has imposed on this program through appropriation action. Currently, the local matching requirement is 65.0 percent. To address the PAT program, the Committee is submitting legislation to expand its application to children from birth to age four

(instead of age 3). In addition, the Committee recommends that during the 2001 Legislative Session the Ways and Means Committee of the Senate and the Appropriations Committee of the House consider increasing the funding for this program with the objective of eliminating waiting lists for program participation.

The Committee also recommends that members of the Legislature, especially members of the Senate and House Education Committees remain abreast of the new information being generated by the

early brain development research work. In recent years, this research has produced many important new insights about how children develop intellectual capacity which, in turn, has led to new ideas about means to provide stimulation to support this process. There is much yet to be learned in this area. It is exceedingly important for legislators to remain informed of this matter and to devote their efforts to fashioning the state policies that will be needed to take advantage of this new knowledge.

Special Committee on Preschool and K-12 Matters

STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School district testimony indicates that state assessments have become somewhat enthusiastically accepted by school districts as useful tools in carrying out the educational mission. These assessments, along with other instruments, are being used in a variety of ways to improve the educational opportunity provided to children.

The state assessments are influencing the design of teacher professional development activities, curriculum presentation, individual student support programs, and school improvement activities. This trend should be continued.

The Committee recommends legislation urged by the State Board of Education to increase from three years to five years the mandatory schedule for review by the State Board of the specified curriculum standards. A five-year review cycle will be less disruptive and less expensive than the current system and will better lend itself to longitudinal analysis of student performance on the state assessments.

The Committee recommends that the State Board of Education ensure that Kansas joins with most other states whose public schools participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) program. This will enable the public to compare Kansas students' performance with that of students in other states. The "Nation's Report Card," as NAEP is called, is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various academic subjects.

The Committee also recommends that the Legislature remain abreast of trends and developments in the use of value-added assessment programs, such as the "Sanders model."

Proposed Legislation: The Committee recommends one bill on this topic.

BACKGROUND

This study topic was proposed in the March 28, 2000, report to the Senate Education Committee of that Committee's Subcommittee on School Reform. The Subcommittee had reviewed this topic, with some emphasis on the concept of

"value-added" assessments, along with several other issues that were components of school reform proposals that had been presented to the 2000 Legislature by House and Senate members.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Overview. The Committee reviewed background information regarding the history of state directed testing of pupils in Kansas; assessment activities in other states; relative performance of Kansas students on tests taken by students in other states; and purposes of state assessment programs, including value-added assessments. The Committee also received testimony from school districts and education interest groups regarding their views on the state assessments and the state curriculum standards.

Conferees. Conferees included a member of the State Board of Education; various State Department of Education staff members; the Co-Director of the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (University of Kansas); spokespersons for Wichita (USD 259), McLouth (USD 342), Geary County (USD 475), Garden City (USD 457), Olathe (USD 233), and Buhler (USD 313); and representatives of the United School Administrators/ Auburn Washburn (USD 437), Kansas National Education Association, and Kansas Association of School Boards. Staff provided information on the "Sanders model," a value added approach to student assessment and statistical analysis which is designed to measure the incremental growth in student performance and to associate these data with the influence of teachers, schools, and school systems. This model has been in effect in Tennessee for the past few years.

History of State Assessments in Kansas. In Kansas, state assessments began in the late 1970s with the development of minimum competency tests in reading and mathematics. These tests were administered through the late 1980s when they were discontinued, in part, because

the notion had developed that the state's interest was better served by higher expectations of students. In the 1990s the focus was on development of curriculum standards for various disciplines and accompanying state assessments. The goal was to adopt "world class" standards and assessments. This activity has focused on the disciplines of mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies.

The state assessments are, and always have been, criterion-referenced tests. That is, the purpose of these tests is to determine if students have mastered a certain specified body of knowledge. These assessments may be contrasted with norm-referenced tests, which demonstrate how one student compares with a larger body of students; that is, how the student performed on the test in relation to other students on an assessment instrument designed with questions that only 50.0 percent of the students may be expected to answer correctly.

Under the Kansas program, both the curriculum standards and the complementary assessments have been developed mainly by Kansas educators. However, in accord with state law, the standards periodically have been evaluated by outside experts and have been modified accordingly. The test development activity has been administered under a State Board of Education contract with the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation, University of Kansas. Nationally recognized measurement and curriculum experts have been secured to serve on an advisory committee that assists in evaluating whether the tests accomplish their intended purpose while remaining free of bias and offensiveness.

The state assessments are designed to

contribute to at least two objectives: program improvement and individual student accountability. The program improvement objective is served by use of the building level test scores for school accreditation purposes. The school accreditation system, known as Quality Performance Accreditation or QPA, is based on the concept of continuous improvement. Assessment results are one important way of demonstrating whether improvement is occurring. Beginning this fall, the performance of each student on a state assessment will be ranked as advanced, proficient, satisfactory, basic, or unsatisfactory. In this connection, the state tests are designed to address both knowledge and application skills, including higher order thinking skills.

Current State Assessment Schedule.

State Board of Education personnel reported that mathematics and reading assessments are administered annually. Due to their costs and the burdens they represent for schools and students, the science and social studies assessments are administered every two years. The state assessment schedule for the 2000-01 school year is as follows: mathematics and science, each at grades 4, 7, and 10; reading at grades 5, 8, and 11; social studies at grades 6, 8, and 11; and the reading diagnostic test, at grade 2. The writing assessment, scheduled to be given at fifth grade for 2000-01, has been cancelled due to lack of funding. Current plans are to administer it in 2002-03. The State Board's second grade reading diagnostic test is administered annually.

A member of the State Board of Education explained that, during the past two years, new standards have been adopted for reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. The Board member also explained that new federal Title I

legislation mandates a study to support compliance of the Kansas assessment model with Title I requirements. The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation at the University of Kansas will be conducting this study. Title I requires assessments to be administered in native language, so Spanish versions of the reading and mathematics assessments are being developed and will be available this coming school year.

The State Board of Education notes that the Kansas law requires curriculum standards to be reviewed by the Board every three years. Based on its experience under this law, the Board has concluded that a five year review cycle would be preferable. The Board expects to make this recommendation to the 2001 Legislature. Such a change would be less disruptive and less expensive than currently is the case and would better facilitate longitudinal analysis of student performance on the state assessments.

Interstate Comparisons of Test Scores.

The general public often expresses an interest in how Kansas students compare in performance on tests with students in other states, and, for that matter, with students in other nations. Conferees explained that criterion-referenced assessments do not lend themselves to such comparisons. Vendors of norm-referenced tests do not publish state comparative information. So, those who seek such information often look to Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or ACT (formerly, the American College Testing Program) scores to make comparisons because published state rankings on these tests are available. The Kansas ranking on the SAT usually is near the highest among the states, and the ranking on the ACT tends to be above the national average. Because only a small percentage of

Kansas students take the SAT (about 9.0 percent in 1999), and because the students who take this test usually are among the more academically motivated, it should not be surprising that the Kansas scores tend to be higher than for states in which a large percentage of seniors take the test. In contrast, the percentage of Kansas seniors who take the ACT is quite high (77.0 percent in 2000), so the Kansas ranking in this regard is more impressive. In 2000, Kansas was among 19 states in which at least 65.0 percent of the graduating class took the ACT. Only four of those states posted a higher mean composite score than Kansas. No state that had at least 77.0 percent of its students tested, as Kansas did, ranked higher than Kansas. The other assessment often cited for purposes of comparison is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Kansas has participated in this program only one time for which scores presently are available. That occurred in 1998 in reading at grades 4 and 8. Kansas tied for eighth among the states in grade 4 reading and placed fifth in grade 8 reading. The Kansas scores were significantly above the national average.

Studies conducted in 1997 and 1998 by the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation of the University of Kansas focused on the performance of Kansas students on commercially available norm-referenced tests administered by Kansas school districts. The studies concluded similarly that, on average, Kansas student performance definitely exceeded performance of the national norm group averages. In general, the Kansas student averages were somewhere in a range between the 60th and 70th percentile ranks on the national norms for these tests.

Assessments in Other States. State Department of Education staff reported

that most states maintain assessment programs and that there continues to be much change among them in this area of activity. Generally, states report that they use the assessments to improve instruction. Some 41 states say that they use state assessments in connection with school accountability; 27, for student accountability; and 5, for staff accountability.

School District Conferees. School district personnel were unanimous in their support of the state curriculum standards and the closely linked assessment program. These conferees explained how the curriculum standards are integrated within districts' instructional environments and how the state assessments contribute to their broad-based school improvement strategies, all of which link to QPA, the state's school accreditation program. The conferees devoted particular attention to the variety of prevention strategies their school districts use to help students in need of assistance and to make adjustments in local curriculum and educational processes in order to achieve target levels of performance by all pupils.

While emphasizing that providing educational services is a local responsibility, conferees also complimented State Department of Education personnel for the leadership and services they have provided in relation to the QPA process. One conferee noted that, under the Commissioner of Education, the State Department of Education continues to work with and involve administrators and teachers throughout the QPA process, including the development of standards and assessments.

Kansas Association of School Boards and Kansas National Education Associa-

tion. The Kansas Association of School Boards spokesperson said that state assessments to measure student achievement are to be expected and are supported by the Association's policies. It was suggested, however, that high school level state assessments be substantially modified or eliminated. One inference was that students and schools do not take these assessments seriously. An option would be to require all high school seniors to take the ACT, which provides scores in the key academic areas. (Currently, about three-fourths of the seniors take this test.) Another option would be to allow students to take the state assessments at the point in high school when they have completed course work covering material on the test. Or, the state could allow students who score high enough on the assessments to satisfy the State Board of Education's graduation requirements in the subject tested, regardless of the number of academic units completed, thus replacing "seat time" with "outcomes." School districts would receive full state funding for students who graduate early or take reduced loads because of meeting test standards. This would not be considered a "high stakes" test as students would not be required to pass state tests to graduate.

The Kansas National Education Association explained its view that the appropriate role of a statewide system of student assessment is to inform interested parties at all levels about the progress of schools in educating the students who are in attendance. The assessment program should indicate change over time on specified standards and should not be used to make teacher-to-teacher, school-to-school, or district-to-district comparisons, but should be one of several indicators used in determining school accreditation. Assessments should be aligned with

high-quality and clearly defined standards and with district curricula and the instructional practices that occur in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Testimony the Committee received from school district representatives leads to the conclusion that the state assessments have become somewhat enthusiastically accepted by school districts as useful tools in carrying out the educational mission. Such has not always been the case. Evidence submitted by school district representatives reveals that the state assessments, along with other instruments, are being used in a variety of ways to improve the educational opportunity provided to the children of Kansas. The state assessments are linked closely to curriculum standards. This means that the assessments have become very useful in helping to measure the extent to which students are mastering what is perceived to be very challenging curricula. The state assessments are influencing the design of teacher professional development activities, curriculum presentation, individual student support programs, and school improvement activities both generally and in connection with the state's school accreditation system which is based on measuring school improvement over time. The Committee regards this trend to be positive and urges its continuation.

The Committee agrees with the State Board of Education's conclusion that the state law (KSA 2000 Supp. 72-6439) should be amended to increase from three years to five years the mandatory schedule for review of the specified curriculum standards. A five-year review cycle is preferable, as it will be less disruptive

and less expensive than the current system and will better lend itself to longitudinal analysis of student performance on the state assessments. The Committee submits legislation to implement this recommendation.

The Committee recommends that the State Board of Education exert its leadership role by ensuring that Kansas joins the overwhelming majority of states whose public schools participate in the NAEP program. This will address the often noted deficiency of the inability to compare Kansas students' performance with that of students in other states on a norm-referenced test. The "Nation's Report Card," as NAEP is called, is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various academic subjects. NAEP samples students

in grades 4, 8, and 12 and reports results in terms of three achievement levels—basic, proficient, and advanced. As noted earlier in this report, Kansas has participated only once in this program, in 1998 at grades 4 and 8. However, the state is participating in the grades 4 and 8 mathematics assessment this year. The Committee believes the time has come for Kansas to assume the role of a full partner in this program.

The Committee also recommends that the Legislature remain abreast of trends and developments in the use of value-added assessment programs, such as the "Sanders model." The potential of this methodology to provide better insight into the effects on student learning of individual teachers, schools, and school districts deserves continued legislative attention.