

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on January 19, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Carolyn Rampey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Kathie Sparks, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Bob L. Corkins, Kansas Commissioner of Education
Senator Mark Taddiken

Overview of State of Kansas education for 2006 by Bob Corkins, Commissioner of Education:

Commissioner Corkins began his comments by stating that the state of education in Kansas was sound. He went on to discuss future educational goals for the state as it completes the "last mile" toward educational excellence for children. He expressed his support for state funding for all-day kindergarten, for the "growth modeling" method to track student assessment, for reform of the state charter school law, and for state funding for the Kansas Academy for Leadership and Technology. (Attachment 1)

Senator Teichman expressed her concerns with regard to Commissioner Corkin's recommendation that the state board be allowed to reverse decisions by local boards that reject charter school applications. She commented, "I don't know that it's the State Board of Education's role to have an oversight on a charter school. It seems to me that the true place for a charter oversight should be with the local school district." In response, Commissioner Corkins noted that charter schools are public schools which must meet the same requirements as other public schools. With regard to local control, he noted that the most successful charter schools are those which have a wide degree of community input. He commented, "We tried to keep that in mind in fashioning this proposal so that we could best facilitate good, honest, open negotiations involving everybody at the local level for the formation and approval of these plans. Nobody is advocating total autonomy for these public chartered schools. Just what the level of entitlement of local school district control over the charter schools is, nobody can say. It's not spelled out in statute. It's really a matter of case law in Kansas and interpreting our constitutional provisions, and it really hasn't been tested."

Senator Lee commented that she saw "growth modeling" as a step forward, but she was concerned about the cost. She asked Commissioner Corkins if the cost in terms of individualizing the educational process for each child had been taken to account by the Board. Commissioner Corkins explained that the process would be phased in, and the first phase would involve putting technology in place to integrate all of the computer systems at the State Department of Education at an estimated cost of \$2.3 million over the span of three years. He noted that, with the technology, local districts could much more efficiently submit all of their compliance reports for federal programs to submit their budget data to the state. Senator Lee responded, "My interest is not in the cost of the data. My interest is in the students. I'm concerned not about your budget; I'm concerned about the budget for the school districts out there. To bring all children to their fullest potential, you're going to have to add staff. Unless you truly implement it, it's false hope."

In view of the Legislature's challenge to find the means to meet the funding needs of the state's current school programs, Senator Vratil asked Commissioner Corkins if the State Board had a suggestion as to how the state could provide additional funding for an all-day kindergarten program. Commissioner Corkins responded, "No. That would be a responsibility that's traditionally not held by the State Board of Education." He went on to say that the budget submitted by the State Board of Education was approximately \$180.0 million, which included an increase in base state aid per pupil, an increase in the at-risk funding, and funding for all-day kindergarten. Acknowledging that the Board's proposed budget would not meet the Supreme Court's order for increased funding for education, he stated, "We believe that it would be a very positive step in that direction. I think the Court would look very favorably on it."

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:35 p.m. on January 19, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Senator Vratil asked whether the State Board had any evidence to indicate that charter proposals are not being given full hearings and that good ideas are being ignored. Commissioner Corkins stated that the Board had only heard accounts, and the information had not been tracked over the years. He noted that, over a ten year period, three different charter proposals had been rejected by local school boards, but he did not know why the proposals were rejected. He estimated that over 30 charter proposals had been approved in the same ten year period. Senator Vratil commented, "If I do the math, not a very high percentage of proposals are being rejected, which does not seem to indicate that there's a problem." Commissioner Corkins stated, "It's my assessment that there's been a chilling effect. Petitioners that would bring a proposal are reluctant to do it unless they already know the local school board is going to approve it."

Senator Schodorf asked Commissioner Corkins what his greatest surprise was when he became Commissioner of Education and come into the public school system. Commissioner Corkins replied, "My greatest surprise has been those things that I mentioned to you in the course of my speech and how much enormous consensus there is in the over all vision, the over all types of reforms that need to happen in the K-12 system. It's been my belief all along, as a result of my research, that those are the types of objectives obtainable through a broader array of school choices. I've been persuaded that, because of that common ground and innovative approaches such as the "growth model," we can make substantial strides towards achieving those common objectives without broadening school choice to any drastic degree."

Senator Mark Taddiken requested the introduction of bill regarding school district consolidation. He explained that seven school districts in his Senatorial district considered consolidation in the last year. Two districts consolidated, one decided not to consolidate, and the other four were making significant progress in two separate consolidations. Two of the districts discovered that, when they consolidate, the average wealth for each student goes up; thus, the state aid they receive goes down, which caused concerns for their bonded interest and LOB. The proposed bill would freeze their LOB and bonded interest payments at what they were two years prior to the consolidation.

Senator Vratil moved to introduce the bill, seconded by Senator Teichman. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2006.

**SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
GUEST LIST**

DATE: Jan. 19, 2006

NAME	REPRESENTING
Willie N. Niborse	TOPEKA NAACP
M. Taddiken	21 st Senate District
Derek Hein	Hein Law Firm
S. S. S. S. S. S.	VCF
Sue Hornbl	Ks BOE
Lucas Bell	Kearney and Associates
TERRY HOWREN	KANSAS FARM BUREAU
Jan. Better	29 th Senate District
Dustin Hardison	Policy Director Senate minority leaders
Dubbie Meador	Ks Livestock Association
Stephen Himes	intern for Sen. Goodwin
Doug Bowman	Coordinating Council on Early Childhood
Graham Kreicker	Unitarian Fellowship of Lawrence
David Rowe	Intern - San Francisco
Mary Musselman	KSA SRA
BILL Brady	SFFF
VAL DeFeuer	SQE
Kris Stunk	KCDD

State of Kansas Education 2006

By Bob L. Corkins

Kansas Commissioner of Education

(Remarks prepared for the Senate Education Committee, Jan. 19, 2006.)

Andy Groves, the former chairman of Intel, the world's largest manufacturer of microchips, uses the phrase "the last mile is the toughest" to describe the difficulties to get the final increment of improvement into a high-tech system.

In many respects, Groves' term applies to education in Kansas. Although Kansas remains one of the nation's leaders in educational quality, the state has much to do to boost the classroom performance of significant numbers of children.

The last mile toward true excellence in education in Kansas will require vision, creativity, a lot of hard work and a renewed dedication to children by state policymakers, educators, parents and the general public.

But, first, the good news.

On almost every statistical measurement of educational achievement, Kansas stands ahead of most of the country. On the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the nation's report card, Kansas ranked seventh in the country on overall proficiency in math and

*Senate Education Committee
1-19-06
Attachment 1*

reading among fourth and eighth graders. The state assessment program shows student test scores generally trending upward. And the Kansas high school graduation rate and results on college admission tests are above the national average.

Kansans should be proud of those accomplishments, for they reflect the high value Kansas has traditionally placed on education and they represent the state's historic commitment to quality schooling.

But none of us in the Kansas education community is satisfied with this status quo. We have to do better. As New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman notes in his best-selling book, "The World Is Flat," success in the emerging global economy – for both individuals and nations – depends heavily on education.

Today, we Kansas leaders must ensure that our children have the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in this new world.

Unfortunately, some young Kansans are woefully unprepared for their challenging future. On last year's state assessment exams, roughly one-fourth of Kansas' fifth graders scored below the proficient level in reading and approximately one-third of the seventh graders were below proficiency in mathematics. Moreover, the state's "achievement gap" in math between

white and minority high school sophomores has not narrowed in the past five years.

Those results are unacceptable. Kansas cannot afford to have so many its young people lack clear competency in essential academic skills.

It is vital that Kansas find ways to educate all its children – and doing so is my primary concern as well as that of the state education department and the state board of education.

To advance our educational goals, the state board last week adopted a set of priorities for the 2006 legislative session. If enacted, this agenda would do much to ensure that Kansas schools meet the demands of the 21st century; it would help us complete that “last mile” toward educational excellence for all children.

The State Board of Education believes that the greatest, most notable progress could be attained if the Legislature allocated sufficient funds to enable local school districts to adopt all-day kindergarten programs. Currently, the state appropriates enough money to cover only half-day sessions for kindergartners.

Numerous academic studies over the past few years and recent discoveries in brain research on how young minds develop provide

persuasive evidence that all-day kindergarten could make thousands of young Kansans better prepared for their later elementary grades.

A recent report by federal officials, for instance, concluded that children in all-day kindergarten performed significantly better in their elementary grades than their peers in half-day programs. Likewise, other studies found that children who had attended kindergarten for a full day scored higher on standardized tests, had fewer grade retentions and were referred for special academic help less often than part-time kindergartners.

Sadly, many young Kansans are denied the advantages of all-day kindergarten. Legislative funding for all-day programs could generate benefits that last a child's lifetime.

From a longer-range perspective, the board asks the Legislature to support a new, promising method of tracking student assessment called "growth modeling." Relying on the newest technology and methods of data collection, growth modeling enables educators to monitor the academic progress of every student.

As you know, under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, students are broken into various subgroups based on income, ethnicity and other factors. The problem is that those larger groups tell nothing about individual students. Growth modeling would identify the academic strengths and

weaknesses of every student and allow educators to design a unique educational plan for each young Kansan.

With funding from the 2006 Legislature, Kansas could become a national pacesetter in growth modeling and be able to target education to meet the individual learning styles of each student.

To further serve the needs of every student, the board asks the Legislature to reform the state charter school law to promote more variety and innovation in Kansas classrooms. Current law gives the local school board total power over whether to approve a proposed charter school in its district. Recognizing that a one-size school system does not fit all children, the board wants to establish a state review process to ensure that every charter proposal is given a full hearing and that no good idea is ignored.

The board also is seeking funding for the Kansas Academy for Leadership and Technology. For the past several years, KAL-Tech has been financed by grants that are running out. The program has proved valuable in training school leaders in management skills and use of technology. Because of this successful record, the board wants the state to continue the program.

Some observers have argued that the major problem with Kansas education is complacency. Although Kansans are justified in feeling pleased

with their enviable record in educating their children, much remains to be done – especially for low income and other at-risk youngsters.

The 2006 legislative session represents a crossroads for Kansas schools. The Legislature faces a major debate over school financing, a discussion that could set the course of the state's public schools for a generation. Educators are seeking and using the best learning strategies and teaching methods to reach children long neglected by some schools. Many parents openly worry whether their kids are receiving the kind of education necessary in a rapidly changing, highly competitive global society.

Failure or mediocrity in the classroom are not options for Kansas – not when this state and its children are at stake. Together, we must meet our educational challenges. Otherwise, our children can rightly accuse us of learning nothing and of lacking the moral courage to confront the future.