

MINUTES OF THE SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dwayne Umbarger at 10:30 A.M. on February 19, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:
Senator Jay Emler - excused

Committee staff present:

Jill Wolters, Senior Assistant, Revisor of Statutes
Alan Conroy, Director, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Kristen Clarke Kellems, Assistant Revisor of Statutes
Audrey Dunkel, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Leah Robinson, Kansas Legislative Research Department
J. G. Scott, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Jarod Waltner, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Melinda Gaul, Chief of Staff, Senate Ways & Means
Mary Shaw, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director/Advocacy, Kansas Association of School Boards
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association
Doug Mays

Others attending:
See attached list.

Chairman Umbarger referred the following bill to the Subcommittee for the State Treasurer's Budget:

SB 508--Postsecondary education savings program, low-income families

Copies of the Kansas Legislative Research Department Budget Analysis Report for FY 2008 and FY 2009 were available to the committee.

Subcommittee report on:

Kansas Department of Education (Attachment 1)

Subcommittee Chairman Dwayne Umbarger reported that the subcommittee on the Kansas Department of Education concurs with the Governor's recommendation in FY 2008 with adjustment and concurs with the Governor's FY 2009 recommendation with adjustments and observations.

Senator Schodorf moved, with a second by Senator Betts, to amend the subcommittee report on the Kansas Department of Education in FY 2009 to consider additional funding for the Kansas Career Pipeline (Item No. 12) following the report requested by the subcommittee at Omnibus. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Senator Betts explained a program called Circle of Friends that pairs regular education students with special education students in a mentoring relationship. The Senator distributed information about the program, Circle of Friends, The Arc of Sedgwick County (Attachment 2) and a study by Wichita State University, Educational Leadership, An appreciative Inquiry into the Circle of Friends Program: A Case Study of Student Mentors, Sponsors and Parents (Attachment 3).

Senator Betts moved, with a second by Senator Wysong, to consider adding \$100,000 for the Circle of Friends Program at Omnibus. Motion carried on a voice vote.

Senator Teichman moved, with a second by Senator Senator Schodorf, to adopt the subcommittee budget report on the Kansas Department of Education in FY 2008 and FY 2009 as amended. Motion carried on a voice vote.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Ways and Means Committee at 10:30 A.M. on February 19, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Chairman Umbarger opened the public hearing on:

SB 531--School finance; base state aid per pupil

Staff briefed the committee on the bill.

The Chairman welcomed the following conferees:

Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director/Advocacy, Kansas Association of School Boards, testified in support of **SB 531** (Attachment 4). Mr. Tallman expressed concern that although student proficiency in math and reading is at an all-time high, requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress continue to rise each year, and the Post Audit study indicated the base budget should increase approximately \$200 per year in addition to inflation to meet those requirements.

Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association, spoke as a neutral conferee on **SB 531** (Attachment 5). Mr. Desetti mentioned that **SB 531** is a sub-inflationary increase in base state aid per pupil. It has been presented as a 2.2 percent increase but in terms of money districts can use, it is a 1.3 percent increase. This is because a significant portion of the funding goes to the increases in the employer contribution to KPERS required under earlier legislation. Mr. Desetti urged the committee to strive, even in tough times, to at the very least maintain the progress that has been made.

Written testimony was submitted by Senator Derek Schmidt on **SB 531** (Attachment 6).

The Chairman recognized Doug Mays, on behalf of the Topeka Public Schools, USD 501, who explained that **SB 531** is important in that it sets a precedent in planning and is a huge step in the right direction. (No written testimony was submitted.)

The Chairman closed the public hearing on **SB 531**.

Senator Morris moved, with a second by Senator Teichman, to recommend SB 531 favorable for passage. Motion carried on a roll call vote.

Chairman Umbarger turned the committee's attention to discussion of:

SB 406--Colleges and universities; fees and tuition; service scholarship programs, applied health care professionals for children with autism

Staff gave a briefing on the bill. Following discussion, the committee determined that they would like additional information from the Kansas Board of Regents on how the scholarship programs work.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m. The next meeting was scheduled for February 20, 2008.

FY 2008 and FY 2009

SENATE WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE

Department of Education

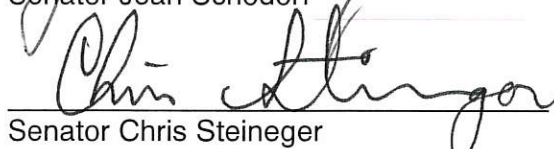


Senator Dwayne Umbarger, Chair


Senator Jay Emler



Senator Jean Schodoff



Senator Chris Steineger



Senator Ruth Teichman

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Attachment 1

Senate Subcommittee Report

Agency: State Department of Education **Bill No.** SB --

Bill Sec. --

Analyst: Robinson

Analysis Pg. No. Vol. --

Budget Page No. 137

Expenditure Summary	Agency Estimate FY 2008	Governor's Recommendation FY 2008	Senate Subcommittee Adjustments
Operating Expenditures:			
State General Fund	\$ 3,055,820,632	\$ 3,079,085,983	\$ 0
Other Funds	498,121,519	497,944,291	0
TOTAL	<u>\$ 3,553,942,151</u>	<u>\$ 3,577,030,274</u>	<u>\$ 0</u>
FTE Positions	212.3	212.3	0.0
Non FTE Uncl. Perm. Pos.	65.7	71.6	0.0
TOTAL	<u>278.0</u>	<u>283.9</u>	<u>0.0</u>

Agency Estimate

The **agency** requests FY 2008 operating expenditures of \$3.6 billion, an increase of \$20.2 million, or 0.6 percent, above the approved amount. The State General Fund request totals \$3.1 billion, an increase of \$1.3 million above the approved amount. The amount includes unlimited State General Fund reappropriations of \$0.3 million, and supplemental requests totaling a net of \$1.0 million.

Governor's Recommendation

The **Governor** recommends FY 2008 operating expenditures of \$3.6 billion, an increase of \$43.3 million, or 1.2 percent, above the approved amount. State General Fund expenditures are recommended at \$3.1 billion, an increase of \$24.6 million, or 0.8 percent, above the approved amount. The Governor does not recommend the net \$1.0 million in supplemental requests, but does fully fund the November 2007 school finance estimates, which increase the approved amounts by \$24.4 million from the State General Fund.

Senate Subcommittee Recommendation

The Senate Subcommittee concurs with the recommendations of the Governor, with the following adjustment.

1. **Reappropriation Language.** Although the appropriations bill has not yet been introduced, the Subcommittee was informed that the bill as introduced will lapse \$16.0 million in general state aid, based on the November 2007 consensus school finance estimates. To provide additional flexibility for the agency in the case of unanticipated current year needs, the Subcommittee recommends that this funding be reappropriated to FY 2009 rather than lapsed. The Subcommittee's recommendation does not affect expenditures in either fiscal year.

Senate Subcommittee Report

Agency: State Department of Education **Bill No.** SB --

Bill Sec. --

Analyst: Robinson

Analysis Pg. No. Vol. --

Budget Page No. 137

Expenditure Summary	Agency Request FY 2009	Governor's Recommendation FY 2009	Senate Subcommittee Adjustments*
Operating Expenditures:			
State General Fund	\$ 3,223,884,736	\$ 3,247,064,222	\$ 6,934,913
Other Funds	509,575,966	523,412,313	(9,042,952)
TOTAL	<u>\$ 3,733,460,702</u>	<u>\$ 3,770,476,535</u>	<u>\$ (2,108,039)</u>
FTE Positions	213.3	212.3	1.0
Non FTE Uncl. Perm. Pos.	70.4	70.4	0.0
TOTAL	<u>283.7</u>	<u>282.7</u>	<u>1.0</u>

* Of the Subcommittee's recommended overall reduction, \$593,039, including \$289,587 from the State General Fund, is related to pay plan adjustments.

Agency Request

The **agency** requests FY 2009 operating expenditures of \$3.7 billion, an increase of \$179.5 million, or 5.1 percent, above the revised current year estimate. The agency requests FY 2009 State General Fund expenditures totaling \$3.2 billion, an increase of \$168.1 million, or 5.5 percent, above the revised current year estimate. The request includes 17 enhancements totaling \$47.3 million, including \$47.2 million from the State General Fund. Absent the enhancements, the agency's request is an increase of \$132.2 million, or 3.7 percent, above the current year estimate, related mainly to the third year of the three-year school finance plan enacted by the 2006 Legislature.

Governor's Recommendation

The **Governor** recommends FY 2009 operating expenditures of \$3.8 billion, an increase of \$193.4 million, or 5.4 percent, above the revised current year recommendation. The FY 2009 State General Fund recommendation totals \$3.2 billion, an increase of \$168.0 million, or 5.5 percent, above the current year recommendation. The Governor's recommendation reflects full funding for the November 2007 consensus school finance estimates.

Senate Subcommittee Recommendation

The Senate Subcommittee concurs with the Governor's recommendations, with the following adjustments and observations:

1. **Pay Plan Adjustments.** Delete \$593,039, including \$289,587 from the State General Fund, to remove the following pay plan adjustments recommended by the Governor. Pay plan adjustments will be considered in a separate bill.

- a. **State Employee Pay Increases.** Delete \$368,167, including \$178,063 from the State General Fund, to remove the amount recommended by the Governor for the 2.5 percent base salary adjustment.
 - b. **Classified Employee Pay Plan.** Delete \$136,122, including \$67,379 from the State General Fund, to remove the amount recommended by the Governor for FY 2009 pay increases for basic vocational classes and for those employees identified as having the most disparity relative to market rate.
 - c. **Longevity Pay.** Delete \$88,750, including \$44,145 from the State General Fund to remove the amount recommended by the Governor for longevity bonus payments.
2. **Parent Education Funding.** Add \$7,539,500 from the State General Fund and delete the same amount from the Children's Initiatives Fund (CIF) for the Parent Education Program. The Governor recommends shifting all of the funding for the program from the State General Fund to the CIF. Although the Subcommittee recognizes that CIF funding has been utilized for partial funding of the program in the past, the Subcommittee believes that the State General Fund is the more appropriate source of funding.
 3. **Kansas Educational Leadership Commission.** Delete \$300,000, all from the State General Fund, in enhancement funding recommended by the Governor for review at Omnibus. The funding is recommended for the Kansas Educational Leadership Commission. The Commission is scheduled to propose recommendations during FY 2009. Until the recommendations are made, the agency has budgeted two-thirds of the additional funding to conduct leadership academies for superintendents, principals and teacher leaders. The remaining one-third would be distributed to ten regional professional learning communities to develop a statewide leadership program which would ultimately be sustained through local funding.
 4. **Discretionary Grants Program.** Delete \$10,000, all from the State General Fund, in enhancement funding for the discretionary grants program for consideration at Omnibus. The funding would be used to increase funding for the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education by \$5,000 (from \$35,000 to \$40,000), and to increase funding for the grant to Communities in Schools by \$5,000 (also from \$35,000 to \$40,000).
 5. **Agriculture in the Classroom.** Delete \$5,000, all from the State General Fund, in enhancement funding recommended for the Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom for review during Omnibus. The funding would increase the grant from \$35,000 to \$40,000.
 6. **Pre-K Pilot/Kansas Preschool Program.** Delete \$1.2 million, all from the Children's Initiatives Fund, recommended for the Kansas Preschool Program. The program, formerly known as the Pre-K pilot, is recommended to be transferred from the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services to the Department of Education, combined with the Four-Year-Old At-Risk program, and renamed the Kansas Preschool Program. Current year funding for the Pre-K pilot in the SRS budget totals \$5.0 million, all from the Children's Initiatives Fund. The Subcommittee concurs with the Governor's recommendation to

transfer the program, but recommends consideration for the enhanced funding of \$1.2 million be delayed until Omnibus. In addition, the Subcommittee recommends that the agency continue to work with the Children's Cabinet on furthering the goals of the program.

7. **New Auditor II Position.** Add 1.0 FTE Auditor II position, to be funded through shifts of existing funding recommended by the Governor, The agency indicated the position is necessary because of additional auditing requirements, an increase in the number of programs required to be audited, and a recent change in the interpretation of the Fair Labor Standards Acts which defines auditors as hourly employees subject to overtime pay which, for all practical purposes, limits them to a 40-hour work week. To reallocate existing resources to fund the position, the agency suggested, and the Subcommittee recommends, the following:
 - Delete \$100,000 from the Children's Initiatives Fund for the Optometric Vision Study.
 - Shift \$100,000 in general state aid for the four-year-old at-risk program from the State General Fund to the Children's Initiatives Fund.
 - Add \$100,000 from the State General Fund for the new Auditor II position.

8. **Replace Federal Title V Funding.** The Subcommittee notes that Governor's recommendation includes \$119,722 from the State General Fund to offset the loss of federal Title V funding for the agency. That portion of the federal funding has been used for 2.0 FTE Education Program Consultant positions in the School Improvement and Accreditation Program. The Subcommittee notes that over the last five years, total Title V federal funding received by the state has decreased from \$3.6 million to slightly over \$885,000. The Subcommittee concurs with the Governor's recommendation to continue funding for these positions with funding from the State General Fund.

9. **New Vehicles.** The Subcommittee concurs with the Governor's recommendation to authorize the purchase of two new vehicles totaling \$37,536 from the agency's Service Clearing Fund. The agency has essentially saved the money over a period of time to fund the purchase of these vehicles, and eliminated the need for State General Fund amounts for this purpose. The Subcommittee commends the agency for utilizing this funding mechanism.

10. **Mentor Teacher Program.** The Subcommittee notes that the Governor's recommendation includes \$1.5 million, all from the State General Fund, designated as enhancement funding, for the Mentor Teacher Program. The Subcommittee notes, however, that there is a distinction between this recommendation and other enhancements. This recommendation would fully fund the statutory provisions of the program as enacted by the 2000 Legislature. The program calls for annual payments of \$1,000 to mentor teachers to support new teachers for their entire three-year probationary period. Between enactment of the program and FY 2006, funding was only provided once, in FY 2002. In FY 2006 and FY 2007, funding was included for only one year of mentoring. The 2007 Legislature appropriated \$1.65 million to provide mentor teachers \$1,000 to support new teachers during their first year and \$500 during their second year. The funding recommended by the Governor would

provide the \$1,000 for mentor teachers for supporting new teachers for the full three-year probationary period and the Subcommittee is supportive of this recommendation.

11. **Additional Consideration for Omnibus Items.** The Subcommittee recommends a number of items be reviewed during Omnibus when the Legislature will have more updated information on the status of State General Fund revenues:
 - **High Density At-Risk Funds.** The agency requested \$2.0 million, all from the State General Fund, to increase general state aid to reflect the State Board's recommendation to change the formula for distributing high density at-risk funding. Under current law, school districts that have an enrollment of at least 40 percent at-risk students qualify for additional weighting and school districts with at least 50 percent qualify for a higher weighting. The State Board has proposed that high density weighting apply to school districts with at least 35 percent at-risk enrollment, and the weighting would increase, based on a linear transition formula, as the enrollment of at-risk students increases. The calculation would level off at an enrollment of 50 percent at-risk students. This would require a statutory change, and a bill to make the change (2007 SB 93) is currently in Senate Education Committee.
 - **Professional Development.** The agency requested \$6.25 million, all from the State General Fund, to fully fund professional development state aid under current law. State aid is limited to the lesser of half of 1.0 percent of a school district's general fund budget, or 50 percent of actual approved program costs. The agency estimates that for FY 2009, eligible statewide professional development expenditures will total \$16.0 million. Based on current law, state aid would be \$8.0 million. The Governor's recommendation for professional development in FY 2009, however, is only \$1.75 million, and the Subcommittee recommends reviewing the rest of the agency's request to fully the fund program during Omnibus.
 - **School Food Assistance Match.** The agency requested an additional \$904,000, all from the State General Fund, for the school food assistance state match, which allows the state to receive over \$130.0 million per year in federal child nutrition funds. Under state law, school districts are to receive 6 cents for each meal served under an approved school lunch program. The agency notes that in past years, the amount paid for approved programs has been prorated at between 4.6 and 5 cents. The additional funding would fund current law at the rate of 6 cents.
 - **Parent Education.** Although not requested by the agency, the Subcommittee is supportive of the Parents as Teachers Program and recommends consideration be given during Omnibus to the addition of \$1.0 million, all from the State General Fund, for the program.
12. **Kansas Career Pipeline.** The Subcommittee notes that a total of \$420,120, all from the State General Fund, is included in the approved current year budget for the Kansas Career Pipeline (KCP). No funding is recommended in FY 2009. The KCP is a non-profit organization that provides a web-based program to

help students identify career choices most aligned with their personal interests and aptitude. The Subcommittee requests a report during Omnibus on how the funding was utilized by the KCP and the number of students served by the program.



Program: The Arc of Sedgwick County's newest program provides special education students with the opportunity to gain confidence and friendships through a mentor relationship with another student in their school. Our Circle of Friends program pairs regular education students as mentors with special education students. The Mentoring for Kids program is designed to function in a reciprocal manner. Mentors gain confidence acting as a leader, while their peer with special needs gains the support and guidance of a regular ed. peer.

Partners: There is a partnership with Wichita Schools and The Sedgwick County Cooperative. This model has been duplicated with The Arc and Cooperative in Butler County, Harvey County, and Wellington. Other districts are coming aboard as they see the multiple benefits this program brings to all students.

As we look to begin this program state-wide, the partnership between USD 259 and The Arc would still exist by employing Valerie Wall, current Circle of Friends Coordinator to serve as a State Wide Coordinator. Her twenty one years of teaching with 18 of them being in special education, give her the expertise to guide this mission. In addition, Ms. Wall has designed the current program being used in the above districts. The program was started and designed while working at Maize High School.

Design: The design is currently being implemented in over 80 schools in the state. Here is the step-by-step design for each school;

1. Meet with superintendent or special education director for approval.
2. Meet with principal for approval
3. Principal designates a sponsor
4. Sponsor and staff identify students with special needs that would benefit from program
5. Sponsor and staff identify mentors, (or buddies), that would benefit from the program. Sometimes they help by providing a list of names or sometimes students sign up themselves.

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6. Students are paired in a 2 to 1 ratio with 2 buddies to one student with special needs
7. Permission slips are provided and signed for each student in the program
8. Monthly activities are designed, planned, and implemented for each school.

Benefits: The benefits for the special education student are obvious with more inclusionary activities and acceptance, this fosters better investment in school, higher self-esteem, and even speech skills have improved, amongst other things. For the regular education peer mentor, self confidence and investment in others, also helps with academic achievement, investment in school, and an understanding of diversity by experiencing it first hand.

Many of these mentors are now going into professions in the teaching field such as special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, etc. Others will be more likely to employ those with disabilities or be better co-workers to those that may have a handicapping condition. In addition, some of them may be legislators, like yourself, and will be more likely to advocate for those with disabilities.

When the schools and state is always looking for ways to help students, cut down welfare, (mentors will hire more people with disabilities), want volunteers, need teachers, and want youth involvement, why not implement and support a program that does all of these things? I have listed the current active districts in the state and those that say they will be starting programs next year. We are excited that so many districts and schools are seeing the benefit of Circle of Friends and we would like to expand this to help even more students, families, and schools across the state.

Active Programs Across the State of Kansas:

1. Valley Center
2. Goddard
3. Maize
4. Clearwater
5. Colwich
6. Eldorado
7. Andover
8. Newton
9. Garden Plain
10. Wellington
11. Hutchinson
12. Wichita

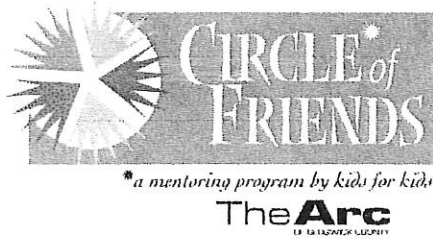
Obligated to start next year:

1. Burrton
2. Augusta
3. Rose Hill
4. Towanda (Circle)
5. Topeka
6. Halstead

Proposal: A Part-time State Coordinator for this first year with 2 additional staff hired as para-professionals will work with the existing 83 schools as well as work toward the goal of adding 50 districts state-wide. This will be done through 5 conferences in various places in the state, a thorough DVD and Notebook including forms and step by step instructions of how to run a Circle of Friends Program. Small stipends will give districts a fund to help pay for costs of students that cannot afford small trips that the groups may take into the community together.

Attachment:

Proposed budget for \$100,000



Proposed Budget for State Coordinated Circle of Friends

- State Coordinator Position with 20 hours per week for 9 months of school year and 10 hours per week in 3 month summer period: \$32,000
- Para Assistants Positions of 35 hours per week each, one office assistant and one classroom assistant at \$12 per hour, (comparable to USD 259 para wages) would equal \$30, 240
- Additional Phone Usage \$200
- Printing of Notebook for districts and other various printing \$10,000
- DVDs for program usage \$4000 (one per district)
- 5 conferences to be held in various parts of the state would include:
 1. Meals for staff for conferences \$300
 2. Lodging for staff for conferences \$1000
 3. Conference supplies \$360
- Office Supplies \$800
- Mileage costs for staff \$2500
- Grant of \$300 per district to use for students who cannot afford costs of activities with current 12 schools and with anticipated starting of 50 districts this next year= \$18,600

Total Financial Need: \$100,000



**An Appreciative Inquiry into the Circle of Friends Program: A Case
Study of Student Mentors, Sponsors, and Parents**

A Special Research Report Prepared by a Wichita State University Research Team for Kansas State

Senator Donald Betts and the Circle of Friends Program

**Wichita State University
Department of Educational Leadership
Research Team**

Raymond Calabrese

Sherry Goodvin

Crystal Hummel

Fuchang Liu

Erica Nance

Jean Patterson

Submitted December 14, 2007

*Wichita State
University
Educational Leadership*

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Attachment 3*

An Appreciative Inquiry into the Circle of Friends Program: A Case Study of Student Mentors, Sponsors, and Parents

Kansas State Senator Donald Betts requested a research team at Wichita State University to study the efficacy of the Circle of Friends Program (COFP). The six member research team was comprised of College of Education faculty and practicing Kansas educational leaders. The research team's overarching question asked: What are the benefits that the COFP provides to the participants in the program? From this question, the research team derived three research questions:

1. How do school sponsors of the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the Circle of Friends Program?
2. How do parents of children with disabilities in the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the Circle of Friends Program?
3. How do former peer mentors of students with disabilities in the Circle of Friends Program describe the benefits of the Circle of Friends Program?

The research team began their research with two propositions: (a) a firm belief exists that parents of children who are served by the COFP would report a positive core of personal experiences for their children as well as themselves and (b) sponsors of the COFP would report the positive impact that the COFP has on stakeholders. Given our propositions, the research team chose to use a line of inquiry that sought to discover a positive core of experiences of sponsors, parents of children with disabilities, and former mentors in the COFP. This research perspective is commonly referred to as *appreciative inquiry* (AI). The AI theoretical research perspective seeks to discover the best in people, their organizations, and the context in which they live and work (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003). In effect, it

emphasizes a search for what is good and identifies when an organization is at its best. AI is both a theoretical research perspective and methodology (Bushe, 1998, July; Calabrese, 2006). In this case, the research team used AI as a theoretical research perspective that guided the development of protocols used in each data collection method.

As the data collection process evolved, the research team made a decision to modify its original research design and collect additional data using an online survey from general education mentors in the COFP. The term *general education* refers to regular education throughout this report. The online survey asked open-ended questions. This data collection method allowed buddies to contribute their highlight experiences in their own words regarding their involvement in the COFP. The COFP uses the term *buddy* when referring to a peer mentor; therefore, the research team uses *buddy* in place of peer mentor throughout this report. Buddies are general education students selected through the COFP's application, screening, and training processes. They are asked to assist in the social inclusion of students with disabilities served by the COFP. A primary role of a buddy is to enlarge the social circle for children with disabilities.

Circle of Friends Program

The purpose of the COFP is to help students with disabilities develop social relationships with other students within the school context (McCurdy, 2005). The COFP has a positive effect on the social acceptance of students with disabilities and elevates their sense of self worth (Frederickson & Turner, 2003). It is also a vehicle that generates respect for students with disabilities from the general education population and allows them to have a better school social experience. The COFP's work enhances parents' efforts to seek facilitation opportunities for their child's inclusion into the school social experience. A

primary facilitation opportunity for social inclusion is through COFP sponsored activities (Turnbull, Periera, & Blue-Banning, 1999).

In addition to augmenting social inclusion opportunities, limited research on the COFP indicates some promising findings that extend beyond social inclusion of students with disabilities that suggest that participation in the COFP adds to the students with disabilities' communication skills (Frederickson & Turner, 2003; Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005). The research team did not find evidence of empirical research that sought to identify the affect of the COFP on the program's sponsors or buddies as well as the parents of students with disabilities. The COFP involves buddies who meet regularly with a student with disabilities. Typically, the COFP is facilitated by a school sponsor. A sponsor can be an administrator, counselor, social worker, or teacher.

In this study, the COFP is offered through the Arc of Sedgwick County (formerly known as the Association of Retarded Citizens). The program pairs students with disabilities with buddies for several reasons: (a) the self-esteem of students with disabilities increases as the students learn to better communicate and become a greater part of the school community and (b) buddies gain self-confidence and learn to accept differences in people. Metaphorically, the COFP creates a widening circle as general education students' perceptions change toward students with disabilities. The changing perceptions carry over into the larger community. As the iterative process continues, students with disabilities become part of the community and are valued for the gifts they bring to the community.

Methodology

The research team used a qualitative case study to describe the positive core of experiences of the COFP's sponsors and buddies as well as the parents of children served by

the COFP. Three specific methods were used to collect data: two focus groups (one comprised of parents and one comprised of sponsors); semi-structured interviews with parents and sponsors; and, an online survey with former COFP buddies. The data were analyzed using the software packages CATPAC and Atlas.ti as well as open and axial coding procedures, content analysis, and pattern matching.

The research team identified six findings:

1. Participation in the Circle of Friends Program reduced the level of alienation felt by parents of children with disabilities (more powerful, less isolated).
2. Sponsors and buddies gained a sense of purpose as a result of their participation in the Circle of Friends Program.
3. The Circle of Friends Program can be enhanced by additional financial, human, and time resources.
4. The Circle of Friends Program reframes how society views and responds to those with disabilities.
5. The impact of the Circle of Friends Program on participants is lifelong and life changing.
6. The Circle of Friends Program creates the ecological conditions for improved inclusion into the school's social experience for students with disabilities.

Each finding is described in the following sections and enriched with descriptions provided by the study's participants.

Participation in the Circle of Friends Program Reduces the Level of Alienation

One of the broad findings that emerged from the data was that participation in the COFP reduced the level of alienation among participants, especially parents. The concept of

alienation is used in its social sense where it represents an estrangement from society and is often evidenced in the forms of powerlessness, isolation, and normlessness (Calabrese & Adams, 1990). Moreover, alienation represents a sense of separation within specific contexts such as work, school, church, or one's neighborhood. The sense of separation is often manifested within the person as a response to that person's interaction with his/her context (Calabrese, 1990). The sense of alienation felt by parents prior to their experience with the COFP was manifested as a personal reaction to their child's disability or a perception of a non responsive school organization. In this study, it was manifested primarily as a form of powerlessness or isolation.

One parent spoke of her sense of alienation. She said, "I was starting to have a little pity party. I see the high school kids out there and they are not sitting home with their moms. So, I was starting to feel sorry for myself and my son." Another parent said, "Being the parent of a child with a disability is often a lonely endeavor." Personal perceptions were often the result of parents' past experiences or their observations of how they believed children with disabilities were treated at school. As a result, their images of what might happen to their child were obscured by fear. One parent said:

I thought if I sent him to school it would be a horrible experience. There are physical characteristics with Down syndrome. You can spot them right off the bat. I thought school would be horrible and that he would be singled out and have the most miserable time of his entire life. I thought I would keep him home with me for his entire life.

The parents of children with disabilities often lacked previous experience with children with disabilities within their family or at school. Many were taught to believe that

children with disabilities were to be avoided. Now that they had a child with disabilities, they believed other people held a similar belief. One parent spoke of her school experiences and how those experiences shaped her images of her child's future:

When I was a student in school, we were separated from the special education kids. We always thought that we needed to stay away from them because something was wrong with them. You didn't eat in the same room with them. They really kept you separated.

In many ways, the parents' personal alienation was a manifestation of their experience at school. They sent their child to school while harboring negative expectations. They often saw their negative expectations fulfilled. As a result, they developed a heightened sense of alienation in relationship to the school setting. For many parents, it was a reaction to the way they believed their child was treated or in the way the school organization reacted to them.

Parents spoke freely of how they felt some schools, without the COFP, were uninviting and made their child's school experience almost intolerable. One parent spoke out, "In one school, the special education classrooms were down here, and the rest of the classrooms were all the way down there. It appeared like a little jail or something." In many cases, the experience was personally painful. Some parents reported that their child was bullied and teased. In other situations, parents perceived their child as tolerated and yet set apart and not allowed to enter into the normal social setting experienced by general education students. One parent said, "Some of the schools were friendly, cordial, but that's all. They didn't get involved. They didn't get the kids involved."

Sponsors also spoke of the alienating environment within schools without the COFP.

A sponsor reinforced the parents' initial negative perceptions of school when she said, "When you talk to some of our students with disabilities, what they have had to experience up to this point has been horrible—bullying, teasing, and being left out."

Out of this context where parents often expressed a lack of hope and a forfeiting of dreams they once had for their child, they now experienced the liberating power of their association with the COFP. For these parents, the COFP provided a social support network that reduced their sense of powerlessness. It provided social inclusion into the mainstream of school life for their children that ended the sense of isolation they felt their children experienced. One parent said, "What's cool is that my son is a part of COFP, and I have met all these people. We take him to the activities, and then we all go do something." Since alienation, in its social sense, represents an estrangement from society, it is often evidenced in the form of isolation. The sense of isolation was decreased by the involvement of the buddies. One sponsor commented:

When the buddies come in, it's like a whole different world for the students with disabilities. Buddies are outgoing. They dance and sing. It's really cool. They really affect the kids. A lot of the buddies feel like the kids are their friends. The [general] education students are constantly saying hi and stopping to talk to them in the halls.

The sponsors also witnessed the transformational effect on parents and their children where alienation was replaced by hope. A sponsor said:

Probably the most exciting time for me is watching the reaction of the parents. Parents see their kids who have never had many friends or participated in a whole lot of activities, now involved with [general] education kids. Their kids are going to different activities in which they normally did not participate. The parents' reactions

make me proud to be involved.

The sponsors were aware that what occurs in the home of the child with disabilities often affects the parent and child's relationship to the school. In effect, the COFP reduced the sense of powerlessness felt by parents who were undergoing significant personal trials at home. One parent was diagnosed with cancer and underwent chemotherapy. The parent spoke passionately about the positive difference the COFP made in her family's life:

I really value the buddies in COFP. They have become supporters of me—what I have been going through with the cancer and everything. The buddies have been amazing. They always ask how I am doing. One of my concerns is my son and how he is going to deal with my situation. He has Down syndrome. It is hard for any kid to see their parent go through cancer, let alone one who doesn't have the mental capacity to really understand the situation. The buddies come to my home and take him on outings so he could be away from the house and not watch me be sick.

The sponsor, referring to this parent, said:

Parents also get a support system when they are facing challenges in their lives. I have a student whose mom is going through chemo treatments as well; the support system was there for him. The COFP even supported the mom in the summer time when he wasn't at school with all of his buddies. They would pick him up and do activities with him so that it allowed some time off for his mom to rest and recover from the chemo treatments. It was an exciting time for him. Without that support system being in place, it wouldn't have happened that way. That is the most important part of COFP for me.

Some level of alienation may still exist for many of these parents; yet, it was clear

that the COFP reduced the parental sense of powerlessness and isolation. The COFP also reduced the sense of powerlessness felt by sponsors. Many sponsors who were associated with the program felt empowered and their empowerment was enhanced because they witnessed a transformation in their school.

Sponsors and Buddies Gained a Sense of Purpose as a Result of their Participation in the Circle of Friends Program

Sponsors and buddies believed they gained a greater sense of purpose because of their participation in the COFP. One intended purpose of COFP is to provide students with disabilities opportunities to gain confidence and friendships through informal activities with general education students. The expectations are that (a) buddies will gain self confidence and act as leaders and (b) students with disabilities gain acceptance and support of general education students. While this was achieved, sponsors and buddies discovered a deepening sense of purpose when they placed the interests of others before self interests. One sponsor stated, "The COFP encourages general education students to step back and realize that there is something more to life. Maybe we are called to give of ourselves more freely and to take care of individuals around us that need extra love." Putting others first was referred to by another sponsor who said, "It helped hundreds of students realize life isn't just about you but other people."

Through the COFP, participants discovered a purpose in fostering connections with students with disabilities. One sponsor recalled the positive effect on a student with disabilities, "It's a wonderful experience to boost someone's confidence."

Involvement in the COFP helped buddies realize the importance of students with disabilities and general education students in each other's lives. With this in mind, a sponsor

expressed, “A lot of the [general education] students coming into the COFP don't . . . realize how much they can learn from the students with disabilities. I think that surprises them.”

The importance of students with disabilities in the lives of general education students enhanced the sense of purpose in the buddy's life. A sponsor stated, “They [buddies] get so much inspiration from these kids. . . . You think it is intended for the special education kids to be drawing everything out, but that is not true. I think it is absolutely equal.”

Another sponsor recalled the impact students with disabilities had on buddies, “The kids make you feel amazing about what you are doing. You walk into a room and you are their best friend; they make sure you know that.” An awareness of one's impact on another was recognized by another sponsor, “I never felt like I made a difference in someone's life until I met this young girl. I realized that even if you feel like you're doing nothing, you are always doing something to impact another person's life.”

Participation in the COFP stressed the importance of acceptance and inclusion. A sponsor said:

You have people interacting with the students in our classroom—they forget that they are different. They treat them as they would any of their other friends. It makes such a significant impact on our students' lives. They [students with disabilities] come from being clustered together where they only interact with their teachers, staff members in their classroom, or other students who have significant disabilities. With the COFP, they get this normalized school experience where they sit at lunch with their friends.

Acceptance and inclusion of students with disabilities created valuable experiences for those once excluded from commonplace occurrences experienced by general education students. One sponsor shared, “Students with disabilities were helped to be more social and

to have a good school experience. They participate in school activities, go to dances, and sit with friends at lunch.”

Acceptance and compassion became a way of life for buddies. Many buddies felt a sense of transformation by helping students with disabilities. One buddy commented:

I felt the best about my work when I realized there was more to life than succeeding. Seeing my friend being more confident in the hallway and talking to my friends during lunch were highlights for me. I wanted to be able to instill in someone else the confidence that my parents had given me.

Another buddy shared a sense of joy that was a result of her participation in the COFP, “I’ve seen it change people’s attitudes. I’ve seen it change people’s lives. It has definitely changed mine. It has taught me to love people in a whole new way.”

It was clear that the buddies’ participation in the COFP was transformational on many levels. The horizons for students with disabilities were broadened by the expanded circle of friends in their lives. One sponsor stated, “Our kids know so many more people now. It is just really neat.” Buddies played an important role in broadening the horizons for students with disabilities by integrating them into the general education context. In doing so, they erased lines of separation between general education and students with disabilities. This was expressed by a sponsor:

I grew up in a generation where there was prejudice toward children with disabilities. For many of our students, they now grow up in a generation where their peers look beyond physical or mental disabilities. They [buddies] are there to be a friend, or ask the students with disabilities a question. Maybe the buddy can’t understand a word they say, but they continue to ask questions and to be in proximity.

The sponsors and buddies believed they gained a sense of purpose as a result of their participation in the COFP. It was through involvement in the COFP that sponsors and buddies discovered a deeper sense of purpose where the interests of others superseded self interests. Involvement in the COFP helped participants realize the importance of acceptance and inclusion of students with disabilities into their lives.

Additional Financial, Human, and Time Resources are Crucial to Sustain the Continued Viability of the Circle of Friends Program

Participants believed increased resources would greatly enhance the work of the COFP and enable more children with disabilities to participate. The sponsors thought increased funding would liberate them from time-consuming fundraising activities, particularly sponsors who held leadership positions. A sponsor said, “We spend a lot of time going out and soliciting donations from our community—things like basketball uniforms, cheerleading uniforms, you name it. That is very time consuming.” Sponsors all agreed that the time saved could be better spent working directly with the children with disabilities or in organizing COFP generated activities.

For a program like the COFP, many events and activities depend on resources. Currently, private donations are the major source of program funding. Sponsors seek donations in the community where their school is located and often target the same sources. One sponsor stated, “You feel bad going back and asking again and again.” One strategy that sponsors use to solicit donations is to inform members of the community of the unique strengths of the COFP. A sponsor said, “Last year, one of our dads thought it [the COFP] was the best thing in the world, and he gave us a huge donation, that helped a ton.”

In addition to funding, administrative support and sponsor and buddy time

commitments were cited as important resources. Gaining administrative support was viewed by sponsors as a quid pro quo activity. Administrative support was more forthcoming when administrators perceived the COFP as functioning efficiently. A sponsor said, “With the way that our [COFP] has grown and the number of kids we have participating, if we did not have good organization then we wouldn’t be able to do anything.” Another sponsor added, “With the COFP being organized and running smoothly, you get more buy in from administration. They [administrators] see what is happening . . . this is valid. It is another circle. COFP validates itself.”

Participants frequently mentioned time commitment as a needed resource. They felt that a significant commitment of time was required by sponsors and buddies. In particular, several sponsors mentioned the time commitment associated with producing a COFP variety show. One sponsor stated, “We had a director that stepped forward to volunteer his time [for the variety show], [it took] tons and tons of time.” Another sponsor added, “We spent six months or better planning the variety show. So to see where it came from, and how much of time commitment everyone put into the show, was impressive—just because they believed in COFP.”

The Circle of Friends Program Reframes how Society Views and Responds to those with Disabilities

The COFP reframes how society views and responds to those with disabilities. The program helps to reframe how society views and responds to students with disabilities; it begins with the student with disabilities’ closest circles and widens to the expanded circles of friends. It reframed the views of parents of students with disabilities; the world became a friendlier place for these parents. It reframed the views of buddies by providing deeper

insight into making a meaningful contribution to life. And, through reframing, it stretched the circle into the community and built broader bands of support and acceptance for students with disabilities.

Parents' views changed. Parents reported how the COFP changed their perceptions of their children with disabilities and their aspirations for them. One parent shared how her expectations changed from not knowing whether her child would attend school because he would be picked on by peers, to his current involvement in the COFP. She said, "They treat them normally. They don't pity them, they are true friends. They care about them."

The COFP produced friendships between students with disabilities and buddies. One parent who sat with her child at a party after prom described this event, "We had a full table of kids; there were kids that couldn't even fit their chairs under the table." Another parent shared how her child was an outsider at a basketball game until [general education] friends approached both she and her child. She said, "The next thing I know, they took him over to the student section. Not only am I amazed that my autistic child leaves my side, but I am amazed how the COFP included him."

The COFP deepened the parents' sense of the goodness of life. When their child was born with disabilities, many parents felt a sense of loss and became overly protective of their child. One parent shared her journey:

You tend to be more cautious. You don't want your child to get hurt. You've seen kids make fun of him. You keep him in this little bubble. The COFP encouraged me to open my arms and let him out.

The parents' sense of the goodness of life deepened and their views changed as they watched buddies in action. A parent stated, "The COFP helped me let my guard down. They

take care of him. I don't even have to ask. They know. For some reason, those kids know what to ask him and they know what he needs." Another parent added, "Everyone needs to be educated about getting along with everybody, whatever their disability, whatever their differences. I think the COFP is . . . going to be an educational tool for everybody."

Other parents' dreams for their children changed. One parent shared, "Never did I dream he'd walk across that stage for graduation." Parents believed that their child will eventually leave home and lead a successful life. The sense of seeing their child become more independent was unanticipated by most parents. A parent described a family visit to a restaurant and the excitement she felt when a boy spoke to her daughter:

She was just ecstatic. I was like, "Who is that?" She said, "He's in . . . [COFP]." I just thought, oh my gosh! [Just] because you have visions of your child never talking to other children; it's totally not that way. It enables you to develop new visions for your child.

Sometimes increased aspirations for their child's future were stimulated by a buddy's work.

A parent said:

One of these days [general] education students are going to be out there. They are going to be employing people and will remember that children with disabilities have talents and that they want to work too. Hopefully they will hire our kids too.

Buddies' views changed. Sponsors work closely with buddies to prepare and train them to become a friend to the students with disabilities. Once trained, the buddies will often share with other general education students that they "feel like it's an honor to be included in COFP." One buddy referred to it as "a huge ripple effect that literally can change the world if we embrace it." Sponsors reported that because of the COFP buddies respond to students

with disabilities with a deeper sense of empathy. It was a sponsor's hope that the buddies "come out of COFP with more of an understanding of people with disabilities; to have more patience with people who are different than they are." As one buddy stated, "[I learn] more about different disabilities, conditions, or developmental disorders, and how they affect people." Parents agreed with the buddy's perception. Through the COFP, sponsors provide opportunities for students with disabilities and their buddies to share in activities to raise awareness and foster friendships. A sponsor spoke of a change she noticed, "Instead of just being students with disabilities who everyone sees and recognizes they are people they talk to and know their names."

Sponsors reported that buddies would go out of their way to greet and talk with the student with disabilities. Sometimes they visited and talked about what they watched on television. One sponsor said, "They [buddies] forget that they [students with disabilities] are different. They treat them as they would any of their other friends." The actions of the buddies provided a deeper sense of hope for sponsors.

I see him [student with disabilities] doing things with his buddy and I know it will carry over into adulthood. As an adult, I love to see what is taking place in my [general] education students' lives. They are going to take that [the lessons they learn] into life—how they treat those with disabilities or how tolerant they are with those who are different from them.

The sponsors' work enabled buddies to change some of their fixed beliefs. They now see similarities between their peers with disabilities and themselves. One buddy reported that she was most excited "when I have the opportunity to perform with a girl with disabilities who loves to sing—just like me." Another buddy said, "There is a boy in the COFP who was

in a wheelchair. He was very picky about who he talked to. I always talked to him.” This buddy’s experience was similar to that of another buddy, who shared, “Even if they can't communicate back to me, they will listen.” Buddies mentioned that they gained an understanding of people with disabilities. One said, “[I am] connecting with people who have souls just like me.”

Parents of children with disabilities also saw the transformation that occurred among the buddies. As they witnessed this transformation, they saw buddies acting without hubris; they saw buddies acting in ways that were beneficial to the child with disabilities as well as the buddy. One parent put it this way, “[General] education students don’t care what the students with disabilities look like or how their physical appearance may be different. They totally accept them.” Another parent said:

They [buddies] don’t think that they are doing anything special. They think that’s the way you should be, and that is the way you should act. They don’t see themselves as superheroes to the students with disabilities. They are just doing what they think they should be doing.

The parents in the COFP saw a transformation in their children as well as a transformation in the buddies. Their experience was extended to the community.

The Circle Widens. The effects of the COFP extended beyond the parents of the students with disabilities or their buddies. The circle widened beyond the school into the community. A sponsor shared this story:

We have a student with disabilities who was named an honorary member of the football team because he is the number one fan at all the games. The players have come to really love him and so have the coaches. The boys that are playing on our

football team are going to go to college and then go to their careers; now they can understand that he [a child with disabilities] can still do some of these tasks, can still be a productive member of society.

Some schools have initiated a basketball league for students with disabilities. The games have become a popular attraction for students. One sponsor stated, “People [were] standing out in the hallway trying to get in. ... it's spreading ‘acceptance’ to the whole school.” Another school put on a variety show comprised of students with disabilities and their buddies. The show sold out. The variety show integrated the community with the stakeholders in the COFP. Local radio and television personalities promoted the event as well as professionals in the arts who volunteered to contribute to its success.

Sponsors were quick to share their beliefs to the affect of the COFP on community attitudes toward children with disabilities. A sponsor said, “We, as a society, are gaining a lot from COFP, they [people with disabilities] are out in the work force and people are accepting them now.” Another sponsor agreed. She said, “Once we reach one person and they meet others it just grows and grows. They teach other people.”

The Impact of the Circle of Friends Program is Lifelong and Life Changing

The impact of participating in the COFP was considered by many participants to be life changing. Sponsors and buddies viewed their role as rewarding and personally empowering. These elements contributed to the perception that participation in COFP was a life changing experience. Parents of children with disabilities began to view their child as having assets; they stopped focusing on their child’s deficits. A parent said, “My daughter doesn’t think she is any different—just fitting in.” Another parent stated, “My son does this bit where he talks about how his friend [a child with disabilities] is more popular than him. It

gives you relief and pride. Your heart just explodes.”

The effect on the buddies was also life changing. Some have considered choosing a career based on their involvement in COFP. A sponsor stated, “I have a lot of buddies who are beginning to think about education as a career . . . several buddies have gone into the special education field because of their experience in the COFP.”

Students with disabilities are recognized and valued by an increasing number of people, both teachers and students. The recognition afforded students with disabilities provided access to social circles that were previously closed. A sponsor stated, “I see them stop our students and ask them when basketball is starting or how did you do in your last game. . . . Our kids know so many more people now. It is just really neat.” The impact of the COFP extends beyond the normal school day into extra-curricular activities. The parents shared that general education students now had an interest in students with disabilities. A parent stated:

The basketball team came up to me after a game last season and said, ‘Your son comes to all of our games. Tell us when he has a Special Olympics game because we want to come see him play.’ They showed up on a Saturday and watched him play. It was amazing.

Sponsors commented that the buddies were sharing the compassion and care gained from the influence of the COFP into other aspects of their lives. A sponsor stated:

Wherever they go [buddies] or when they see a student with disabilities, they act the exact same way. They go out and spread that feeling wherever they go. It is not just with their little group. It changes them; they carry this with them forever.

Parents believed the COFP had an important impact on their children’s lives beyond

the school day. They felt their child's quality of life was enhanced through the COFP. Parents also commented on the impact the COFP had on their thinking related to their child's ability to get along in the world. A parent said, "I feel confident my son won't be alone if something happens to my husband and me. He has people who will be there for him. I never felt that way before. I was always worried." Parents believed their child gained a heightened sense of respect, a widening circle of friends, and the creation of a support group. A tearful mom with cancer said:

Every time I see them, they come up to me and give me a hug and ask how I am doing. They prepared food and brought it over. They called and asked if they can pick up my son and take him swimming or to the movies. They are keeping him busy with activities. They are genuinely concerned.

Another parent felt that the COFP's potential to transform lives could be extended well beyond the boundaries of the typical school. The parent spoke passionately, "If the people running the country came from the COFP and thought that being different was okay; it would change the world."

The Circle of Friends Program Creates Ecological Conditions for Improved Inclusion into the School's Social Experience for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities have historically been excluded from the mainstream of education. The passage of the Education for All Handicapped Act in 1975 (EHA; P.L. 94-142) required public schools to provide educational services to all children regardless of the extent of their disabilities. These children, however, were almost always placed in separate classrooms and sometimes separate schools. Consequently, special education developed as a parallel system to general education and little interaction occurred between general education

students and students with disabilities. In recent years, education professionals and advocates for students with disabilities have argued the benefits of educating students with all types of disabilities in general education classrooms. Beginning with the reauthorization of EHA in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, students with disabilities were to receive their special educational services with their general education peers to the greatest extent possible. Districts and schools have struggled to overcome a history of a separate and segregated special education system and for various reasons efforts to include students with disabilities in general education have not always been successful.

In contrast, COFP is not only a model for successful inclusion of students with disabilities in and outside the classroom; it has the potential to serve as a vehicle for facilitating school-wide inclusive educational practices. It was evident that the COFP helps foster a culture of acceptance through encouraging relationships between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. While the COFP introduces buddies into the special education setting, most inclusion efforts begin with placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom. One mother shared her astonishment at walking into her son's special education homeroom:

So many general education students [buddies] come in and had taken the time out to come in. [My son] was flipping this football with three other guys. There were some on the computer. Everybody was with everyone. It was just wow; I never believed this would happen for [him] in high school.

Instead of pushing students with disabilities into a general education environment where the teacher and other students might resent their presence, relationships between students with disabilities and buddies are developed naturally over time. A parent described how through

the COFP her son was no longer excluded from school activities, and relationships that were initially engineered eventually “flowed together into natural relationships.” Another parent simply stressed that the core of COFP “is not the activities, it is the relationships.” Study participants frequently talked about the program as an opportunity to “make connections” with other human beings, which helped break down barriers between general education and special education.

Although relationships are formed in the special education environment, the culture of acceptance eventually permeates the school. COFP begins with a small, safe circle, but the circle expands and grows. As a parent put it, “It’s a COFP, but it’s not a closed circle. It’s ever widening. It’s really expanding.” Another parent of a student with disabilities further explained, “COFP becomes more than just circle of friends; it becomes everybody else they know.” A buddy called it the “ripple effect,” that is, “Once it became ‘cool’ to hang out with the students with disabilities, then the overall attitude towards these students changed.” Another buddy believed that COFP “changed the school, and the tolerance of students with disabilities by other students.” A parent further validated that COFP “really made a difference on the whole school, the staff too.” The program was described as “contagious,” as a teacher sponsor explained:

You walk through the lunch room and see some of the students with disabilities sitting with the [general] education students. Maybe some of them are buddies and then it will be some of the buddies’ friends and it just grows from there and everyone starts being a little more accepting.

Thanks to the COFP, students with disabilities are now active participants in high school life, an outcome that initially surprised parents, teachers, and buddies. A sponsor

expressed:

Without COFP there is a good chance that my students would not attend football games because that is not something their parents are sure they can do. . . . We all just start to say—why can't they? We start to look at things not as barriers but as challenges, things that we can overcome. We can find ways to include more of our students.

When sponsors, parents, and buddies can see and experience what is possible, they can create even more opportunities to include students with disabilities in the mainstream of high school, both inside and outside the classroom.

The COFP ripples out into the community, as well, as one parent explained, "It's gone out to the community because they work at different stores and restaurants. It's really opened people up . . . to just accepting them as normal kids." A program sponsor agreed that COFP has helped change attitudes within the community:

You go anywhere in town and you see them working. People are less afraid of them now; less fearful. . . . I go to Dillon's or Pizza Hut now and look for the response of people. It is wonderful to watch.

Deep, meaningful, and long lasting relationships are formed through COFP that transcend the boundaries of the high school. A parent explained that the COFP has "expanded the family." Several of the COFP buddies are well beyond high school age, but are still welcomed at school activities. Buddy relationships also extend beyond the school day or the school year, with involvement in after school and summer activities. The buddies become friends of the family. One parent whose son has completed high school was thrilled that "he still has that continuous circle of friends."

The COFP started out with assigning buddies to mentor students with disabilities; this synergy has resulted in genuine, long lasting relationships between people. From COFP's beginnings in the special education classroom, the circle has extended its influence and provided a culture of acceptance so crucial for effective inclusion within schools.

Discussion and Conclusions

The research team purposely sought to apply an appreciative inquiry into the COFP to discover what was good about the people involved in the organization, the organization itself, and its potential to be a generative force in society. In doing so, the research team entered the study with the assumption that the COFP was already a force of transforming the lives of the students with disabilities. This assumption did little to prepare the research team for the overwhelming way the COFP transformed the lives of its participants and those in its circle of influence. In many ways, the COFP challenges the guiding assumptions of society regarding people with disabilities. It challenges these guiding assumptions not in an overt confrontational manner, but with a velvet glove as it presents people with disabilities as worthy human beings who want to be a part of society and who can contribute meaningfully to society's continual evolution to a more equitable and just community of people. Moreover, it challenges these assumptions by daring to suggest that people with disabilities are society's teachers and become a gift to mainstream society, if mainstream society can open its mind and heart to the teachings of people with disabilities.

In doing so, the COFP raised a series of fundamental questions about our society.

COFP asks:

1. What would our schools look like if students with disabilities were socially included with general education students?

2. What would be the affect on general education students who dared to befriend a student with disabilities?

3. What if a school environment dared to take a risk to formally support a program that promoted the social inclusion of students with disabilities?

As a result, the COFP challenges the belief system within society that people with disabilities are different from those who consider themselves with disabilities. It raised the consciousness of those within the school environment by daring to suggest that it is important for human beings to care for others and to extend compassion to others.

The COFP's challenge to society's guiding assumptions is heightened by its call to become a society that is a source of caring, compassion, and love toward all. In many respects the COFP asks us to elevate ourselves to what we can be and answers the call of Dr. Martin Luther King:

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

Dr. King's words were spoken to the racial divide in the United States; however, they have great applicability to the divide that exists between general education students and students with disabilities. From the research team's findings, it appears that the COFP's mission is to erase this divide. It does so by seeking out the best in people; it taps into the natural sense of altruism held by human beings. Smith (1981) suggests that altruism is a facet of human motivation where the individual receives a deep intrinsic sense of well being for making

others feel well without the expectation of return from the other. It was this altruistic sense that is seen in Vanier's (1999) story of Claudia. Claudia is a story of a girl who was blind and autistic. She was made to feel secure and develop a sense of belonging because she was in a community permeated with love; the love that Claudia felt brought her intense joy. What that community did for Claudia, the COFP is doing for students with disabilities.

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785-273-3600

Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

on
Testimony on SB 531

by

Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director/Advocacy
Kansas Association of School Boards

February 19, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **SB 531**, which increases the base budget per pupil by \$59 for Fiscal Year 2010.

KASB acknowledges and appreciates the work of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the chief sponsors of this bill to support increased funding for public education, particularly in light of the *Montoy* school finance case and the Kansas Supreme Court's directions to provide suitable funding for public education. Your efforts to improve education funding have resulted in substantial increases in student achievement, and raised our state's already high ranking on education measures.

However, many serious needs remain unanswered. Although student test scores have risen significantly, too many students still remain at risk of academic failure, largely because school funding remains far below the level determined by the Post Audit study to be necessary to meet student outcomes. Too many children begin school unprepared, in part because of inadequate pre-school programs. Our schools face a growing shortage of qualified teachers, especially in critical areas like math, science and special education, because both salaries and support for induction, mentoring and professional development are too low.

Let us be clear: raising the base budget \$59 per pupil, an increase of 1.3 percent at a time when the consumer price index rose about 4 percent for the 12 months ending December, 2007, will do little to address those problems. But anything less will be even more inadequate. That is why KASB appears today as a proponent of this bill, but will continue to advocate for a school finance plan that truly meets the needs of all students.

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From time to time, even legislators who have been strong supporters of school funding express frustration at what they see as the continuing demand for “more” by school leaders. When, they ask, will it ever be enough? I would respectfully answer that schools will stop asking for more support when the state and federal government, colleges and employers, parents and patrons, teachers and other staff, stop asking *more of schools*. For example:

Although student proficiency in math and reading is at an all-time high, requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress continue to rise each year, and your Post Audit study indicated the base budget should increase approximately \$200 per year *in addition to inflation* to meet those requirements.

Although Kansas ranks near the top of the nation on the National Assessment of Education Progress mathematics tests, we are called upon to respond to a “crisis” in math, science, engineering and technology education by the Governor, legislators and business leaders.

Although the percentage of Kansans with high school diplomas and college degrees is at an all-time high, our Regents system raises questions about the preparation of students for college, and the job market continues to reward educational attainment and punish drop-outs.

Although special education expenditures and achievement scores are at unprecedented levels, parents and advocates continue to seek higher levels of services through the legislative, regulatory and judicial processes.

Although school boards have made significant commitments to raise salaries, in part by raising taxes to increase their commitment through the local option budget, teachers continue to seek not just a “cost of living” increase equal to the consumer price index, but salaries are competitive with other professions and other states.

As a result of these stubborn facts, KASB believes we must continue to advocate for funding based on what schools need to do the job they have been given, not based on what is available. We offer our sincere appreciation for those who share that goal, and commend those who believe that strengthening our public schools is the best economic development, social justice and quality of life investment we can make.

Thank you for your consideration.



Making public schools great for every child

KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

**Mark Desetti, Testimony
Senate Ways and Means Committee
February 19, 2008**

Senate Bill 531

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you to share our thoughts on Senate Bill 531.

With so many sponsors on this bill, even appearing as neutral makes me feel a little like the skunk at the picnic.

We support a move to out-year funding – in this case, the addition of a fourth year to the three year plan. We believe that the Legislature should be in the habit of staying ahead on school finance. Our schools need to be able to plan and waiting for the passage of the annual school finance bill has always been problematic when it came time to set budgets and negotiate contracts.

We also support additional funds being allocated on base state aid per pupil as the best way to give flexibility in the expenditure of those funds and the best way to address educator salaries. The education community is generally united in saying that the salary issue is now front and center. The 2010 Commission and the State Board of Education have both endorsed increases in BSAPP as the best way to get money into educator salaries.

But what do we see as wrong with SB 531?

SB 531 is a sub-inflationary increase in base state aid per pupil. It has been presented as a 2.2% increase but in terms of money districts can use, it is a 1.3% increase. This is because a significant portion of the funding goes to the increases in the employer contribution to KPERS required under earlier legislation.

The Legislature has recognized the problems facing KPERS through the large unfunded liability and in response passed legislation ramping up the employer contribution to the system. The state, for a variety of reasons, has often chosen to not pay in to KPERS the appropriate employer contribution and so has contributed significantly to the unfunded actuarial liability. Employees, it should be noted, have always made their statutorily mandated contribution.

During the course of the three year school finance plan the state has made significant increases in school funding. And while much of these increases were targeted to specific student populations, there was enough money to begin making progress on educator salaries.

The Kansas salary rankings have gone from about 42nd in the nation before the three year plan to 37th today. Everyone agrees that we need to continue to move forward. The State Board of Education wants to see Kansas move to at least the median of the states and so they have recommended an additional increase of \$41 on BSAPP for next year and a \$200 increase for the fourth year. The intent is to move salaries up.

Our fear is that what progress has been made recently will be lost if we return to the days of sub-inflationary increases to BSAPP. Unless other states also provide sub-inflationary increases, we will lose ground on educator salaries, exacerbating the looming teacher shortage.

Please do not think that by emerging from the school finance lawsuit, the work is done.

We urge this committee to strive, even in tough economic times, to at the very least maintain the progress you have made.

Capitol Office

State Capitol, Room 390-E
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1504
(785) 296-2497

15th District Office

P.O. Box 747
Independence, Kansas 67301-0747
(620) 331-1800



Senator Derek Schmidt
Majority Leader

Committee Assignments

Chair: Confirmation Oversight
Vice Chair: Assessment & Taxation
Organization Calendar & Rules
Member: Judiciary
Agriculture
Legislative Post Audit

Message Only (800) 432-3924

Fax: (785) 296-6718

Email: schmidt@senate.state.ks.us

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 531
Presented to the Senate Ways & Means Committee
by Senator Derek Schmidt

February 19, 2008

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of Senate Bill 531, which would create an additional year of funding for the multi-year school finance commitment we have made in recent years.

We have a one-time opportunity to create a "rolling" two-year commitment to school funding. If we fail to act this year, we will fall back into the old pattern where we start in January considering the school-funding law for the next August, we settle that debate in April or May (after the spring revenue estimates), and then with little or no time to plan we expect local school districts to use their funds effectively.

There is a better way. This bill is it.

By enacting this measure this year, we can embed the concept of advance planning in our system of school finance in Kansas. We should not let this rare opportunity pass.

I am one who believes that the only way to get this done this year is to adhere to the time-honored principle of KISS - Keep It Simple Stupid. That's why this bill proposes to increase funding by the rate of inflation (the CPI-U), which was a concept debated and adopted in a previous year. That's also why this bill proposes to put the funding into base state aid per pupil rather than opening anew the always-contentious debate about various weighting factors and other measures.

In short, I encourage you to keep this bill simple by adhering to concepts previously adopted. Adding other bells and whistles to it, or disturbing the existing balance within the finance formula, may be tempting, but doing so would invite opposition from those who oppose those particular changes. That very possibly would start us on the path toward stalling and delaying -- the old tactic used in the school finance debate. And that path would lead us away from the one-time opportunity to lock in some certainty by passing this bill this year so we create a rolling two-year school finance commitment.

Thirty-three senators, of both parties, thought this simple, straightforward approach made sense. That's why they cosponsored this bill. I encourage you to give this approach serious consideration and deference.

Thank you for your consideration.

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