

House Education Committee

Testimony on Innovation and Excellence in Kansas' schools

Small School Initiatives

Dr. Don L. Wells, KSSA Executive Director

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Good morning and thank you to Chairman Arund and the entire committee for allowing time to hear about the positive educational activities that happen in the schools of Kansas. Most of the information will be about our smaller schools that are being creative, innovative and courageous in the instructional programs for all students. My only concern is that there is not enough time or paper to adequately speak to the many exciting and excellent programs and initiatives provide by the schools of Kansas.

I have been a superintendent in Kansas for 25 years in schools that have had 5,000 students and as few as 100. Prior to that time, I was a teacher, coach and principal for 16 years. This is the first year that I have not been actively engaged in the daily operations of a school district but certainly the position with the KSSA has allowed me to stay close to the education of the children of Kansas. I also serve as a mentor for five new superintendents through the auspices of the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute at Kansas State University and travel to and visit more schools than those of the five mentees who I might add are certainly a wonderful new set of district leaders for the state and their respective communities.

As I visit with the superintendents of Kansas, I must say that I am constantly amazed by the innovations and passions for implementing new ways of providing exciting learning environments for their districts. There are many programs in technology that are present in the schools. Smoky Valley has an innovative program called Vision_ Tek at which the students can earn the Apple Certified Technician. Smoky Valley is also the only public school in the nation to be able to provide service on any Apple product. Many other schools have installed the white boards that provide the interactive computer software for student and teacher use. The one to one laptop initiatives are becoming more and more popular as the prices come down for the equipment. Schools such as Hesston have differing levels use for technology throughout all the grade levels within the district. The use of technology to assist with classroom observations for gathering data to be used for improved professional development needs. These 'walk-through' processes provide for immediate feedback to the staff and also provide a valuable part of the evaluation process. Scott City, Augusta, Ulysses are just a few districts involved. Rock Hills district in North Central Kanas has used technology to provide for teacher presentation to be on video and be required homework so that students can watch it multiple times prior to the authentic learning opportunities provided by the teacher the next day. The concept provides for more time of teaching and

learning. Many schools are using interactive television to provide for courses that are not readily available for students such as foreign language, college credit classes, and advanced math and science.

The At Risk funds have spurred many activities for students that need extra help, intensive intervention, and additional time by qualified staff before and after school as well as embedded within the school day. Most of the schools have implemented various versions of the MTSS (Multi-Tier Systems of Support) to help their students. As an example, Medicine Lodge reports that MTSS has improved their reading and math scores. Rock Hills has employed a K-12 MTSS coordinator to research and coach the best practices. Scott City uses the At Risk funds in part to support credit recovery during the school day and summer school. Additionally, many schools use the at-risk funding to provide for character education programs so that students have the opportunity to discuss their concerns as well as to learn about correct way to handle problems that come their way each and every day. Independence Schools use a program they call, 'Can We Talk'. It has helped their minority students get the issues on the table and to get a better understanding about their concerns. Some districts are using community and school based focus groups to discuss and propose solutions to common problems. Alternative schools are also another good use of the at-risk funding. These schools provide for a more specialized instructional program for students that have a more difficult learning situation. Without these alternative schools, many of the students would be in danger of dropping out of school. Southwestern Heights has 60% of its students as second language learners. The bi-lingual funds and at risk funds provide for extended learning, MTSS and all-day Kindergarten. With this help, the district reports that they still manage to meet the requirements of NCLB.

Other exciting programs are continually being implemented such as the Civil Air Patrol in the Southeast Cherokee District that has grown to be the largest in Kansas. Students in the program learn from community volunteer during the day and evenings. Topics are leadership, aerospace, community service and search and air rescue. Cheney has purchased laser and vinyl cutters to start a tech class to have an in house business to design and produce signs for schools and businesses. The purchase has saved over \$3,000 by producing its own athletic plaques. Beloit Schools have a program that promotes the cooperation between community and schools that assists all children in the community from birth to five to enter school ready to learn. Pittsburg High School has implemented an art class for the severely handicapped. The students and families are very receptive as it is a positive and needed experience. WaKeeney Schools has program that requires students to have an individual learning plan to help them achieve their goals. Each program has parental input in the formulation and review.

The Marion County Special Education Cooperative has developed the FACT program (Families and Communities Together). It provides the community with a continuum of services that includes a traveling team of qualified faculty to provide autism services. Other districts have programs for Kinder Prep and preschool for others than just the four year old at-risk. Some are fee based because of the need and community acceptance.

The studies of the environment are becoming more prominent as being green is more than just being Kermit the Frog. Programs in recycling and research are becoming staples in science and community service. Other programs such as the 'Real Life Program' in Ashland, allows students to get actual

information from community leaders about legal issues, banking and credit establishment, insurance and taxes and employment.

This testimony is just a very small slice of the many good instructional programs and learning experiences in Kansas Schools. Every public school district in Kansas strives to improve each year. Every organization, whether it is the state of Kansas or your neighborhood school, can improve. I know that each school is concerned that their test scores meet the requirements. I know that each school at their local level does its best to meet the needs of its community. I believe that this presentation will support the viability of all schools; large and small.

It is also apparent that there are those individuals and groups that are very critical of the Kansas Public Schools and most of them have not been in our schools long enough or have enough background to properly evaluate their concerns. It is my contention that most local communities like their schools and are proud of them because of what those schools do to connect in meaningful ways with the world-at-large. Schools are getting better each day and those that work in the educational environment know more about student learning than ever before. Those superintendents, principals, teachers, support staff and boards of education all are part of the success equation. The programs that we have discussed in this testimony would not be possible without the funding available from the various weightings supplied in the budget each year. Because of the reduced funding, schools have reduced positions and programs and yet, the students and staff continue to find positive ways to make the day count and to make their time matter. Your schools in Kansas are doing a good job.

Thank you for your attention and I stand for questions and comments.