

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dwayne Umbarger at 1:35 p.m. on February 2, 2004 in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Senator Anthony Hensley (excused)
Senator Christine Downey (excused)
Senator Jean Schodorf (excused)

Committee staff present:

Carolyn Rampey, Legislative Research
Kathie Sparks, Legislative Research
Theresa Kiernan, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Judy Steinlicht, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Jerry Ostermann, USD 299 Sylvan Grove, School Board President
Pat Baker, Kansas Association of School Boards
Leo Kerwin, Retired School Teacher

Others attending:

See Attached List

Briefing from USD 299 Sylvan Grove on Small Schools

Senator Emler introduced Jude Stecklein, Superintendent of Sylvan Grove School District, Jerry Ostermann, President of the School Board, and school board members, Steve Boor and Ruth Sorensen.

Jerry Ostermann came to the Committee to give them an overview of Sylvan Grove School District. The district covers 320 square miles in three counties and some students ride the bus 45 minutes one-way every day. On the wall of the superintendent/school board office, hangs a plaque that says "kids come first in every board decision." They want to concentrate only on what is good for the students and what will make the students a productive adult.

The Wichita Eagle did a survey on the results of 2000-2001 Kansas Assessment test scores and ranked each school. Sylvan Grove had the best score at 1.3. The score possibilities were 1 to 10; one being perfect and 10 being the worst.

Some think that small schools cannot produce, but Mr. Ostermann told the Committee that this is not true. He advised that they recognize the importance of early intervention and that is the reason they started a preschool a few years ago. Adding new programs is difficult, but with monetary and volunteer help from the community and students the task was accomplished. A 21st Century Learning Center after-school program was also started which is run by the teachers from 3:30 to 6:00 p.m. each day. The kids have a snack, playtime, do homework supervised by the teachers and have a variety of learning activities and field trips involving the community which helps to draw the community into the school.

Mr. Ostermann informed the Committee that they have cut back 33% of administrators, 20% on bus route, 17% on secretarial staff, 11% on teachers. Everyone pulling a heavy load, but the school is adamant that students do not get short-changed.

Large school projects included building a house with the direction of the industrial arts teacher and receiving nearly a semi-truck load of used computers which the students rebuilt and tested. Many were used in the school system and the rest given to students who needed one. The computer techs and the computer class built a super computer to use for video editing for a new community access television project.

Mr. Ostermann advised that 100% of the students participate in extra circular activities and have been very successful in placing and winning championships in their competitions. They have a near 100% graduate rate. They have at least 60 community members who volunteer working directly with kids in the

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classroom, in the office and cafeteria saving the district an enormous amount of money. This is what builds a bond between community and school. It gives the community a feeling of ownership in the school. Mr. Ostermann asks the Legislature to not pass any bills that would take away from their small school. They feel very strongly that small schools have provided an undisputed quality education. Attached is a copy of the survey completed by the Wichita Eagle on the results of 2000-2001 Kansas Assessment test scores. ([Attachment 1](#))

Overview of School Consolidation by KASB

Pat Baker, Kansas Association of School Boards gave the Committee an overview of what their office is doing to assist those boards of education in the state that are voluntarily choosing to consolidate. In 1965-66, Kansas had over 1300 school districts; by 1967-68, Kansas had 336 school districts; today there are 302 school districts and by July, the number may be 301 or 300. There is an ongoing change in districts. In 2002 one school dissolved and transferred their land, their buildings and students to another district. Another dissolution is expected to take place this summer.

Consolidation is often conceived as two districts voluntarily coming together, deciding that both boards will petition the state board for approval to consolidate and take it to their voters in the district. What occurs long before that is cooperative agreements and districts sharing everything from the superintendent, staff, boards in-service and special development programs for teachers. KASB tried to find out just how many districts were using cooperative agreements, but found it impossible because almost all districts were using some form of cooperative arrangement. Cooperative agreements often lead to consolidation. KASB is working with boards of education to help them through legal means of entering in a cooperative agreement, consolidation, or dissolution. Mrs. Baker told the Committee that consolidation is not what saves money. It is the closing of buildings, particularly high school buildings because it costs more to run a high school than a grade school. KASB staff is working with at least 10 districts now that are in some stage of discussing consolidation or dissolution. KASB is trying to put together instructions for districts to follow for consolidation or dissolution. Pat addressed questions from the Committee. Attached are copies of documents containing figures Mrs. Baker used for her testimony. ([Attachment 2](#))

Comments Supporting Small Schools

Chairman Umbarger recognized Kansas retired school teacher, Leo Kerwin from Wellsville, Kansas who asked to say a few words about small schools. Mr. Kerwin's view is that small schools are not too expensive and that they do offer plenty of opportunities. Mr. Kerwin stated that he taught school for 37 years, in small schools, schools with 800-1200 students, and in inter-city schools. He recognizes that his experience does not make him an expert. According to material he has from the State Board of Education, the amount of money it takes to keep the small schools open is a very small percent compared to the total school budget. He disputes that small schools offer nothing. He has taught in big schools where at least 400 students are bored because they are not involved in anything and school means nothing to them. Mr. Kerwin's testimony was passionate about keeping small schools open.

Meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for February 3, 2004.