

MINUTES

AT-RISK EDUCATION COUNCIL

April 13, 2006
Room 423-S—Statehouse

Members Present

Dr. Andy Tompkins, Chairman
Bob Corkins, Commissioner of Education
Dale Cushinberry
Deloyce McKee
Bud Moore
Dave Self

Members Absent

None

Staff

Kathie Sparks, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office
Mary Shaw, Committee Secretary

Conferees

Senator John Vratil
Val DeFever, Schools for Quality Education, Manhattan, Kansas
Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director, Kansas Association of School Boards
Bill Reardon, representing Kansas City, Kansas, USD 500
Diane Gjerstad, USD 259, Wichita, Kansas
Robert Winter, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools, USD 305, Salina, Kansas
Susan Rogers, Associate Superintendent of Learning and Instructional Services, USD 501,
Topeka, Kansas

Chairman Andy Tompkins called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., and welcomed everyone to the meeting. Chairman Tompkins turned the Council's attention to review of the February 27, 2006, meeting minutes. *A motion was made by Dee McKee, with a second by Dave Self, to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2006, meeting as presented. Motion carried.*

The Chairman welcomed the following conferees:

Senator John Vratil explained that his purpose is to provide top quality education to students in the State of Kansas and he hoped that he could help accomplish that mission (Attachment 1). He mentioned that there was one formula to distribute the money and a completely different formula to determine the children who will receive the services.

Senator Vratil noted a study made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which determined that there are a large number of students who qualified for free lunches, but do not really qualify because they do not meet the poverty guidelines (part A of his testimony). He explained that he believed that this is a growing problem. Senator Vratil noted that in the study for the year 1999, it was noted that the lunch rolls were 27 percent higher than what they should have been, based on an analysis of census data.

He also explained that his interest in this item was the result of the Legislative Post Audit study (part B of his testimony) and the question of the relationship between funding and services, and the finding that the State's basis for funding at-risk services has little relationship to the number of students who receive at-risk services. Senator Vratil pointed out that two points clearly stood out in the study:

- The small districts in our sample provided at-risk services to far fewer students than the number of students counted for funding purposes, and they tended not to be the same students; and
- Several of the larger districts identified all students who qualify for free lunches as being eligible for and receiving at-risk services.

Senator Vratil distributed copies of a chart titled, "Compare Total At Risk Students to Students Receiving Free Meals" provided by the State Department of Education which lists every school district in the state (part C of his testimony). The Senator also provided copies of information from Kenneth Daniel, titled "Which Kansas Districts Cheat the Most?" (part D of his testimony).

A copy of a memorandum was distributed by Senator Vratil from Barbara Hinton, Legislative Post Auditor, that was addressed to Representative Colloton (part E of his testimony). The memorandum addressed the estimated education-based at-risk counts. In closing, Senator Vratil explained that the definition of at-risk student should be changed to one who is not proficient in either reading or math, which is an objective standard.

Val DeFever addressed the topic of at-risk students in rural Kansas schools (Attachment 2). She explained that Kansas schools are striving to close the achievement gap and decisions are being made at the local level to determine how new at-risk funding can best be used to address the needs of their at-risk students. Ms. DeFever called attention to the fact that all the districts cited by Legislative Post Audit are spending more on at-risk students than the state provides in at-risk funding. The most effective approach used by rural schools to close the achievement gap is a natural condition for rural schools—that of a low student-to-teacher ratio.

In closing, Ms. DeFever explained that meeting the academic needs of their students is a clear indication that the components of rural schools need to be replicated in all schools across the state, and funded accordingly. She also requested that rural schools not be penalized but help districts that are large or who are not performing as well as rural districts to close the gap.

Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director, Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), provided information regarding at-risk students, measuring student outcomes, differences in student achievement, and KASB recommendations ([Attachment 3](#)). Mr. Tallman explained that the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates the difference in lifetime earnings between a high school graduate and a drop-out is about \$260,000. He noted that for Kansas, the impact of drop-outs from the class of 2004 alone could be up to \$2.6 million. Mr. Tallman provided detailed state and national assessments in his written testimony.

Mr. Tallman provided details on the following KASB recommendations in his written testimony:

- Include funding for all-day kindergarten in the finance formula;
- Significantly increase funding for at-risk programs, to a weighting of at least 0.25;
- Broaden the criteria for providing at-risk funding to factors in addition to poverty;
- Allow greater flexibility in using at-risk funds, as long as acceptable outcomes are met;
- Base accountability on results;
- Support professional development for teachers, administrators, and school board members;
- Repeal the “65% for instruction” state goal;
- Encourage best practices and innovation; and
- Encourage outstanding teachers to work with at-risk students.

Bill Reardon, former high school teacher and former member of the Kansas Legislature, provided information on behalf of the Kansas City, Kansas, USD 500 ([Attachment 4](#)). Mr. Reardon mentioned that USD 500 supports a broadening of the definition of an at-risk child for the purpose of securing state funding. He noted that this endorsement is contingent on retaining the current method based on qualification for free lunch and then adding other students who are in need of at-risk services. Mr. Reardon added that they are opposed to eliminating the free lunch criteria entirely.

Mr. Reardon explained that USD 500 has demonstrated over the past several years that at-risk children can achieve in the classroom and the improved scores for Kansas City students on state assessments reinforce that fact. He also noted that they are encouraged by the Audit recognition of the additional challenges large urban districts face with generational poverty, gang activity, violent crime, and homelessness. (It was indicated that USD 500 educates over 800 homeless students.)

In closing, Mr. Reardon mentioned that it is a disturbing fact that the State of Kansas is currently not adequately meeting the educational needs of large numbers of poor children. Implementation of the Post Audit Report would result in thousands of Kansas kids realizing their individual potential.

Diane Gjerstad, representing Wichita Public Schools, addressed the Council regarding defining “at risk” ([Attachment 5](#)). She noted that the current definition of at-risk is on target and quoted information from the Legislative Post Audit cost study analysis, appendix 17, page C-10, “Poverty has consistently been found to be negatively associated with student performance.”

Ms. Gjerstad explained that students who are surrounded by poverty, crime, drugs, and lacking in a family support system require exceptional efforts by teachers and support staff to keep the students in school. She noted that Wichita employees who have worked in other districts agree that urban poverty is unique and more difficult than poverty in small towns Kansas.

In closing, Ms. Gjerstad provided the following recommendations:

- Increase the at-risk weighting to 0.484;
- Establish an urban poverty weighting of 0.242;
- Maintain the current definition of at-risk and expand the definition to include "reduced" lunch student; and
- Maintain a weighting driven distribution of funds.

Ms. Gjerstad provided copies of the Kansas State Department of Education Report Card 2004-2005 Math and Science Assessment Results to the Council members ([Attachment 6](#)).

Robert W. Winter, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools, USD 305 Salina, provided information regarding at-risk students ([Attachment 7](#)). Dr. Winter explained that USD 305 demographics certainly mirror those in many other school districts in the state. He noted their most vulnerable populations of students- special education students, at-risk students, and bilingual students- continue to grow in numbers in the Salina district.

Dr. Winter mentioned that as with any program, early intervention is the key and he supports the research premise that if students can see graduation within the traditional four-year frame, their chances of graduation increase significantly. He described several programs that have been introduced into their schools such as their Truancy Program and their Credit Recovery Program. Dr. Winter expressed support for the current funding formula. He noted that there is a high correlation between the economic status of a child and his or her academic success. Dr. Winter did caution the Council against altering the structure to use the numbers of students scoring below proficient on the state assessment and noted he believed this alteration would significantly increase the number of students qualifying for at-risk services.

In closing, Dr. Winter stated that the current at-risk programs are yielding solid results; however, they need to expand, not reduce.

Susan Rogers, Associate Superintendent of Learning and Instructional Services, USD 501, presented information regarding at-risk students, and spoke to the issue of poverty which is a factor in at-risk ([Attachment 8](#)). She noted that it is known that there are failing students everywhere; however, there is a higher rate of failure in those schools and districts with a predominance of students on free and reduced lunch.

Chairman Tompkins announced that the Council will have a work session on May 30, 2006, beginning at 9:00 a.m. The Council discussed the following points at the end of the meeting:

- Responsibility that every opportunity is there for all students;
- Requirement that each district reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014;
- Communication with the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) in making support services more available;
- Closure of the Topeka State Hospital and other similar facilities means that more and more children are coming to public schools as at-risk students;

- Gain additional knowledge of what other schools are doing to help at-risk students;
- Define what is the local role and what is the state's role in providing for at-risk students;
- The realization by all parties that the common thread is that more dollars are needed for at-risk programs;
- Accountability is needed from the school districts and as a monitoring tool;
- Need for a system evaluation; and
- The state should have one data management tool that the schools could use.

Chairman Tompkins asked the Council members to look at all of the information that has been presented so far and be ready to focus their work on these issues.

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Prepared by Mary Shaw
Edited by Kathie Sparks

Approved by Committee on:

May 30, 2006
(date)