

## MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:40 p.m. on February 6, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent: Anthony Hensley

Committee staff present: Sharon Wenger, Kansas Legislative Research Department  
Carol Toland, Kansas Legislative Research Department  
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office  
Matt Todd, Revisor of Statutes Office  
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Senator Laura Kelly  
Representative Judith Loganbill  
Senator Terry Bruce

Senator Schodorf called attention to the minutes of the January 23, 24, and 28 meetings.

Senator Steineger moved to approve the minutes of the January 23, 24, and 28 meetings, seconded by Senator Apple. The motion carried.

**SB 399 – School districts; mandatory attendance of kindergarten; age of eligibility**

Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office, noted that **SB 399**, which was introduced at the request of Senator Laura Kelly, mandates kindergarten but provides that, if a school district has all-day kindergarten, a child will not be required to attend all-day kindergarten and would only be required to attend half-day kindergarten. The bill also provides an exception for religious groups or denominations who object to their children attending kindergarten. She noted that the age for attendance was lowered from seven to six. A conforming amendment in Section 4 changes the reference to “proof of identity” from first grade to kindergarten.

Senator Kelly testified in support of **SB 399**, noting that she requested the introduction of a similar bill in the 2007 session that simply lowered the age at which children are required to attend school from seven to six years old and mandated kindergarten attendance. However, at the hearing on the bill, some religious groups raised concerns about requiring attendance for all children, which would include children who are home-schooled or whose religious community had its own system of education. It was decided that this issue should be studied in more depth during the 2007 interim. It was determined that a provision exempting religious groups from mandatory kindergarten was needed. Senator Kelly reiterated her support for lowering the age of attendance and mandatory attendance and did not object to the appropriate exemptions. (Attachment 1)

Representative Judith Loganbill noted that she served as a reading specialist for students in kindergarten through the fifth grade in a school in Wichita. She went on to say that the curriculum for kindergarten has advanced far beyond what it was several years ago. Today, kindergarten is the new first grade. By the time children leave kindergarten, they are expected to know how to write their first and last name, to know the alphabet, to have beginning reading skills, and to know addition and subtraction facts to ten. Therefore, it is almost impossible for a kindergarten teacher to meet the curriculum with a half-day class. If kindergarten students do not have these skills by the time they are in first grade, extensive remedial work is needed.

On behalf of kindergarten teachers, Representative Loganbill requested that the following language in Section 2, subsection (c) be amended: “the child will attain the age of five years on or before August 31 of the school year.” She suggested that the August 31 be changed to August 1. In response to her suggestion, Senator Vratil said that the proposed change would cause school districts to lose a portion of their state aid because they would lose a month’s worth of students by pushing the date back. He commented that, for some districts the loss would not be a problem, but for others, the loss would be substantial.

## CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:40 p.m. on February 6, 2008, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Senator Terry Bruce addressed questions he and committee members had regarding the intent of wording in the section of the bill allowing an exemption for religious organizations. He explained that he had concerns with the phrase, “recognized church or denomination that objects to attendance of kindergarten.” He pointed out that these terms do not apply to the Amish. The area in which he was raised refers to them as the Amish community. The Amish do not consider themselves to be a denomination, and they do not have church building. They invite one another to their homes on Sunday afternoon for their all-day service. If you are not invited to the Sunday gathering, it means you are being shunned from the Amish community. He noted that Mennonites in the area in which he was raised also have cultural differences. They speak a different language unique to their own; however, they are expected to read and write English as well. Because of the cultural differences of these religious communities, it would be difficult for them to qualify for the exemption. Senator Bruce also had concerns about the requirement that exempted organizations must get approval of their curriculum from the Department of Education every two years. In his opinion, these religious communities are not a part of the problem the bill concerns. He recommended that the bill be amended to simply exempt the religious communities. He agreed to work with the Committee on the amendment.

For the Committee’s information, Sharon Wenger, Kansas Legislative Research Department, distributed copies of a memorandum regarding the recommendations by Legislative Educational Planning Committee and the 2010 Commission regarding kindergarten. (Attachment 2)

There being no others wishing to testify, the hearing on **SB 399** was closed.

Senator Schodorf began a discussion on possible action on a previously heard bill, **SB 426** concerning enrollment and the general fund budget in certain districts affected by disasters. It was that consensus of the Committee that more information was needed before taking action on the bill.

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

The next meeting is scheduled for February 7, 2008.