

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on January 17, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Carolyn Rampey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education
Scott Frank, Legislative Division of Post Audit

Senator Schodorf recalled that the Committee discussed the Legislative Post Audit cost study analysis the past week on Wednesday and Thursday. She reiterated the following statement she made at the Thursday meeting regarding concerns about the future status of small schools: “When we started last year working on a plan, our agreement was that we were going to work on a plan that would be good for all kids, and that’s my promise. I hope that’s how we will look at this report. I don’t know what’s going to come out of it; we have not been given the charge yet to develop a plan. I think we will, but I just want to give everybody my intention, my promise, that we’re going to be looking at education that’s good for all kids, including small districts, large districts, medium districts.”

Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education, introduced Ronald W. Poplau, the 2006 Kansas Teacher of the Year, and he also called attention to a handout picturing Mr. Poplau and the 2006 Kansas Regional Teachers of the Year – Letitia Petijean, Betty A. Peterson, Roxie Peterson, Betsy Leonard Wiens, Tana Priddy, Laurie A. Mercer, and Pamela A. Olson. (Attachment 1) Mr. Dennis noted that Mr. Poplau was one of four national finalists for Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Poplau informed the Committee that he teaches community service at Shawnee Mission Northwest High School. He emphasized that, on an overall average, students who enroll in community service score one whole grade point higher than those who are not enrolled in community service. He noted that a former student came to his community service class as a severe drug addict. As she became involved in community service, her grades soared, she became a national speaker for volunteerism, and her classmates chose her to be a speaker for graduation. She went on to graduate from college with honors, and she now has a salary in excess of \$100,000. He commented that this student’s story tells him that high tech must be balanced with high touch. He noted that he, the student, and her mother would be on the Martha Stewart Show in February as a success story.

Laurie Mercer, who teaches a fourth and fifth grade combination class at Spaght Academy in Wichita, noted that one of her goals as an educator is to connect with underachieving students and help them achieve. She explained that the majority of the students at Spaght Academy are free-lunch and African-American; therefore, the term “achievement gap” is a reality there. She commented that, when the students hear about the achievement gap, they often begin to believe that they cannot achieve at the same level as other students. She emphasized that the first important step in helping with the achievement gap is connecting with students and teaching them that they can achieve no matter what their circumstances.

Betty Peterson, who teaches math and computers at Nemaha Valley Junior High School in Seneca, noted that she believes that all students can learn, but they learn at different rates. Therefore, she feels that after school programs are necessary to meet the students’ needs. In her experience, she has found that many students appreciate one-on-one quality time with their teachers because many of them come from families which offer little or no support at home. She believes that after school programs can help keep students in school and help them achieve at higher rates.

Betsy Wiens, who teaches math at Washburn Rural Middle School in Topeka, noted that she has been teaching for 31 years, and she is amazed when she reflects on the changes that have occurred over the years.

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When she began teaching, students were much more alike with similar needs and skills. Now, she begins her day with 32 students, one of whom is autistic and needs a paraprofessional to help keep him focused. Her next hour has 25 students, seven of whom have individual education plans, and it is a race and a challenge to meet their needs every day. In her fifth hour, she has a student with dyslexia, and she often has to count on her to communicate to her what her needs are and how she can help her. Two weeks ago in the same class, a student with a mother in jail and a father who has been in the Rescue Mission, was caught with drugs. Ms. Wiens noted that the problem in this type of situation is that there is not enough resources, including time and support, to work with each of the students the way she would like to do. She stressed that additional funding is needed to add resources, support services, and time.

Tana Priddy, who is a reading specialist in the DeSoto school district, commented that reading unlocks the doors to the world, and it is a critical skill that enables all students to experience success across the curriculum. She noted that she was fortunate enough to receive grants which have allowed her to provide each kindergarten and first grade student in her building with 48 books to take home to practice the skills they are learning at school. In addition, programs have been developed to assess three and four-year-olds with kindergarten readiness skills, and homework clubs have been developed for students who may not get assistance at home because they do not have a parent at home in the evening. She observed that the programs set the students up for success and unlock the door to limitless possibilities.

Pamela Olson, who is a math teacher at Campus High School in Haysville, noted that her focus is on her students, their achievements, and their needs. She believes that all students can learn math with extra help and time. She relayed her experiences with students with special learning needs who need reinforcement. She pointed out that these students learn every day even though they have special needs, and she emphasized that she and the paraprofessional assigned to her room act as a team to help the students achieve.

Letitia Petitjean, who teaches kindergarten at Obee Elementary School in Hutchinson, explained that some children who enter her kindergarten class have started to read, but many others are still attempting to decipher the difference between a letter and a number. She noted national research studies prove that the unfortunate reality is that many kindergarten students are entering at-risk and are behind. In Kansas, research shows that up to one-third of the students come to school unprepared for the learning process. She noted that the risk factors include academic, social, language, emotional, and health deficits that hinder the learning process. In her district, she implemented a jump-start program which allows some students to receive extended services with the teacher, student, and family in the home setting. She explained that the family visits she conducts throughout the year help teach parents to teach their children. Students who have participated in the program have become very successful in their school career.

Roxie Peterson, who teaches kindergarten in Wamego, noted that she has taught kindergarten for 26 years, and the last seven have been in an all-day situation. She explained that the school began to develop an extended program the year it had 20 out of 100 children come in with vocabulary skills in the two-year-old to three-year-old range. Three years later, the school board made the decision to fund all-day kindergarten. She commented, since the implementation of all-day kindergarten, teachers have been astounded by what the children can do, given a little time and high expectations.

In response to questions from the Committee, the teachers indicated that they spend 60 to 70 hours a week in the classroom in addition to attending extracurricular student activities to connect both with the students and their parents. They also noted that, during the summer months, their time is spent on professional development activities and developing goals for the upcoming school year. In addition, they explained that, in the past five years, school districts have focused on a common goal to align their curriculum with the standards on which they will be assessed. They expressed support for reduction in class size, year-round school programs, and summer support programs.

Senator Schodorf called upon Scott Frank, Legislative Division of Post Audit, to respond to requests made at a previous meeting for more information on the Post Audit cost study analysis of Kansas K-12 schools. In response to a question raised by Senator Vratil regarding the hold-harmless concept and amounts in the cost study, Mr. Frank distributed a handout showing the number of districts that would be impacted by the hold-harmless provision using the outcomes-based approach. (Attachment 2) He called attention to a table on

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page one of the handout which showed that 140 districts would receive hold-harmless funding in 2006-07, and 17 would receive that funding under the 2007-08 standards. He noted that a spreadsheet attached to page one showed a district-by-district comparison of the amount of hold harmless funding for 2006-07 and 2007-08 using the outcomes-based approach. Senator Lee began a discussion regarding the achievement levels in the schools which would receive less money at which time Senator Vratil clarified, "The chart in front of us has nothing whatsoever to do with student achievement or whether a student is proficient in math and reading. It merely suggests that, if the Legislature were to provide the outcomes-based formula recommended by Legislative Post Audit, that it would take about \$9,351,000 to hold-harmless 140 districts who would otherwise get less money next year than they received this year. That's all that it says." Following further discussion, he confirmed with Mr. Frank, "I think what your study did was exactly what the Legislature directed you to do. And that is to determine what it would reasonably cost for students in a given school district to reach the proficiency levels required by the State Board of Education. I don't know anywhere in your study where you say that, if the school district is achieving at 75 percent proficiency level, that they should receive less money." Senator Schodorf commented, "It will be our responsibility to deal with this information and develop the plan. We don't want to penalize districts that are over-achieving their goals."

Mr. Frank noted that several legislators had requested that the Division of Post Audit provide what the education costs would be in future years under the outcomes-based approach, using the standards adopted by the State Board of Education. In response to this request, he called attention to copies of a memorandum which projected the costs for the outcomes-based approach to 2013-14. The memorandum was accompanied with a table showing the estimated cost of meeting future performance standards in 2006-07 dollars. (Attachment 3)

There being no further time for committee discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 18, 2006.