

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on January 19, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

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

Conferees appearing before the committee: Bob L. Corkins, Kansas Commissioner of Education
Senator Mark Taddiken

Overview of State of Kansas education for 2006 by Bob Corkins, Commissioner of Education:

Commissioner Corkins began his comments by stating that the state of education in Kansas was sound. He went on to discuss future educational goals for the state as it completes the “last mile” toward educational excellence for children. He expressed his support for state funding for all-day kindergarten, for the “growth modeling” method to track student assessment, for reform of the state charter school law, and for state funding for the Kansas Academy for Leadership and Technology. (Attachment 1)

Senator Teichman expressed her concerns with regard to Commissioner Corkin’s recommendation that the state board be allowed to reverse decisions by local boards that reject charter school applications. She commented, “I don’t know that it’s the State Board of Education’s role to have an oversight on a charter school. It seems to me that the true place for a charter oversight should be with the local school district.” In response, Commissioner Corkins noted that charter schools are public schools which must meet the same requirements as other public schools. With regard to local control, he noted that the most successful charter schools are those which have a wide degree of community input. He commented, “We tried to keep that in mind in fashioning this proposal so that we could best facilitate good, honest, open negotiations involving everybody at the local level for the formation and approval of these plans. Nobody is advocating total autonomy for these public chartered schools. Just what the level of entitlement of local school district control over the charter schools is, nobody can say. It’s not spelled out in statute. It’s really a matter of case law in Kansas and interpreting our constitutional provisions, and it really hasn’t been tested.”

Senator Lee commented that she saw “growth modeling” as a step forward, but she was concerned about the cost. She asked Commissioner Corkins if the cost in terms of individualizing the educational process for each child had been taken to account by the Board. Commissioner Corkins explained that the process would be phased in, and the first phase would involve putting technology in place to integrate all of the computer systems at the State Department of Education at an estimated cost of \$2.3 million over the span of three years. He noted that, with the technology, local districts could much more efficiently submit all of their compliance reports for federal programs to submit their budget data to the state. Senator Lee responded, “My interest is not in the cost of the data. My interest is in the students. I’m concerned not about your budget; I’m concerned about the budget for the school districts out there. To bring all children to their fullest potential, you’re going to have to add staff. Unless you truly implement it, it’s false hope.”

In view of the Legislature’s challenge to find the means to meet the funding needs of the state’s current school programs, Senator Vratil asked Commissioner Corkins if the State Board had a suggestion as to how the state could provide additional funding for an all-day kindergarten program. Commissioner Corkins responded, “No. That would be a responsibility that’s traditionally not held by the State Board of Education.” He went on to say that the budget submitted by the State Board of Education was approximately \$180.0 million, which included an increase in base state aid per pupil, an increase in the at-risk funding, and funding for all-day kindergarten. Acknowledging that the Board’s proposed budget would not meet the Supreme Court’s order for increased funding for education, he stated, “We believe that it would be a very positive step in that direction. I think the Court would look very favorably on it.”

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE Senate Education Committee at 1:35 p.m. on January 19, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Senator Vratil asked whether the State Board had any evidence to indicate that charter proposals are not being given full hearings and that good ideas are being ignored. Commissioner Corkins stated that the Board had only heard accounts, and the information had not been tracked over the years. He noted that, over a ten year period, three different charter proposals had been rejected by local school boards, but he did not know why the proposals were rejected. He estimated that over 30 charter proposals had been approved in the same ten year period. Senator Vratil commented, "If I do the math, not a very high percentage of proposals are being rejected, which does not seem to indicate that there's a problem." Commissioner Corkins stated, "It's my assessment that there's been a chilling effect. Petitioners that would bring a proposal are reluctant to do it unless they already know the local school board is going to approve it."

Senator Schodorf asked Commissioner Corkins what his greatest surprise was when he became Commissioner of Education and come into the public school system. Commissioner Corkins replied, "My greatest surprise has been those things that I mentioned to you in the course of my speech and how much enormous consensus there is in the over all vision, the over all types of reforms that need to happen in the K-12 system. It's been my belief all along, as a result of my research, that those are the types of objectives obtainable through a broader array of school choices. I've been persuaded that, because of that common ground and innovative approaches such as the "growth model," we can make substantial strides towards achieving those common objectives without broadening school choice to any drastic degree."

Senator Mark Taddiken requested the introduction of bill regarding school district consolidation. He explained that seven school districts in his Senatorial district considered consolidation in the last year. Two districts consolidated, one decided not to consolidate, and the other four were making significant progress in two separate consolidations. Two of the districts discovered that, when they consolidate, the average wealth for each student goes up; thus, the state aid they receive goes down, which caused concerns for their bonded interest and LOB. The proposed bill would freeze their LOB and bonded interest payments at what they were two years prior to the consolidation.

Senator Vratil moved to introduce the bill, seconded by Senator Teichman. The motion carried.

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

The next meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2006.