

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:40 p.m. on February 10, 2005, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent: John Vratil—excused

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

Conferees appearing before the committee: Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Board of Education
Jim Armendariz, Ogden Elementary School, USD 383
(Manhattan-Ogden)
Vicki Seeger, Pleasant Hill Elementary School, USD 345
(Seaman)

Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Board of Education, introduced two teachers who received Miliken Family Foundation National Educator Awards at the beginning of the current school year: Vickie Seeger, who teaches third grade at Pleasant Hill Elementary School, and Jim Armendariz, who is the principal of Ogden Elementary School. He informed the Committee that the Miliken Family Foundation is a not-for-profit organization, and it is operated similar to a business, which is unusual in the education arena. He explained that nominations for the award are secret. Individuals who are nominated are not aware that they have been nominated, and they never know who nominated them or what was said about them. This year, the teachers will go to Washington, D.C., where they will be given two or three days of the best staff development available nationwide. In addition, they will be treated as royalty at a banquet. At the end of an evening of celebration, the two Miliken brothers who staff the Foundation will give \$25,000 to each teacher. Approximately 120 teachers will receive the award this year.

In her comments to the Committee, Ms. Seeger noted that her main passion as a Kansas educator is the recruitment and retention of quality teachers. She said the state is losing the best and the brightest professionals due to low salaries, the increased accountability measures, and the need for more support in the classroom. She related her personal experience with very talented teachers who left teaching because their salaries made it difficult for them to stay in the profession and to support a family. She noted that 39% of well-trained new teachers are lost during their first six years of teaching. In addition to the loss of new teachers, 35% of veteran teachers will leave the profession over the next five years. Ms. Seeger said her second passion is staff development. She emphasized that staff development opportunities are critical to assist teachers in keeping up standards in curriculum. However, teachers are facing challenges because budget cuts have limited their opportunities to attend conferences and workshops. She went on to say that she has seen an increase in the number of at-risk students coming into her school. She noted that there are many at-risk students who are not being served appropriately because they are not in federally entitled schools. In conclusion, she said all students deserve to have their needs addressed, and it is important to find a way to recruit and retain the teachers that can serve their needs.

Mr. Armendariz informed the Committee that he is principal of a small school near Fort Riley, and 70% of the students are free and reduced lunch students. Nearly one-third of the students require special education services, and there is nearly a 50% turnover rate. But in spite of the high needs population, the school has been highly successful in educating its children. Last year, the school attained state standards of excellence in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Commenting that education is not worth much if you teach kids how to make a living but you do not teach them how to live, he noted that his students also reached the standards of excellence in honesty, compassion, caring, and many other virtues taught to them throughout the year. He noted that his teachers are highly dedicated and work tirelessly ten to twelve hours a day. He commented, "Together, we have created a culture that truly values learning. While our students from many homes experience hunger, yelling, abuse, and hopelessness, the school has become a haven to these children." He observed, "How long can these good people keep from cracking under the stress of the intense accountability without the compensatory awards?" He noted that the increasing accountability despite diminishing resources

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is pushing hard working teachers out of the teaching profession. In conclusion, he said, "We cannot afford to lose our most experienced professionals nor can we relegate our children to anything less than a first class education under less than competent replacements."

After thanking Ms. Seeger and Mr. Armendariz for coming, Senator Schodorf called the Committee's attention to the minutes of the February 3 and 7 meetings.

Senator Goodwin moved that the minutes of the February 2 and 3 meetings be approved, seconded by Senator Ostmeyer. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 14, 2005.