This is the year the Chiefs will be going to the Super Bowl. This is the year that Jayhawk Football breaks through and wins the Big 12!

Before you get too excited about my predictions, my fellow Chiefs and Jayhawk faithfuls probably recognize the symptoms of an affliction known as “long-suffering but ever optimistic fanitus.” It is my understanding that the same thing occurs among Royals fans and K-State basketball fans, but I have no personal experience in these areas.

The beautiful thing about sports is that every season is a fresh start. The Chiefs are reporting for training camp undefeated in 2013. Even though Coach Weiss described his team as a “pile of crap,” they are undefeated and unscored upon for 2013! Optimism floods the locker room, fan sites and sports pages.

Education shares a unique attribute of professional sports in that every year we get a fresh start. Teachers get a new classroom full of students, districts get a new group of wide-eyed kindergartners and our state brims with the optimism of a new school year.

Every year, every educator gets to decide to either repeat the year they had last year, or to make a commitment to making changes and getting better. That’s the joy of starting over. Were we just so good last year that we can’t risk changing a thing? Or did we make some mistakes last year that we can commit to correcting.

I listened to a commenter recently talking about politicians and their inability to admit to mistakes. He pontificated that if a president admits to making an error, friends and foes alike will demean him. This leads to a total lack of introspection among our politicians, and dooms them to fail over and over again.

In education, we have to be introspective. By examining our tactics, strategies, methods and ourselves, we pave the way for improvement. Every educator, building, district and system should spend these summer months thinking about how they will get better next year.

At KASB, we are constantly looking at how we can improve service to our members. How can we do a better job of teaching new skills to board members? How can we make the learning more engaging and accessible? How can we improve our communication so that it is just in time and just enough? How can we anticipate needs and be prepared with what schools need when they need it?

We are making internal adjustments, too. How can we align our staffing to better serve our members? How can we make the best use of our assets to get better?

This year we added Gary Sechrist to the Leadership Services Team. Gary will improve our ability to serve members onsite all over the state. Kay Tibbs joined our staff to improve how we use technology to serve our members. We are looking at new and different ways to use our building, including leasing unused space to provide additional resources to serve our members. We will spend time analyzing our methods, tactics and strategies to improve what we do.

My sports analogy might be troublesome, because the ever optimistic Chiefs or Jayhawk fan might point out that those teams make changes and adjustments in the offseason that create great optimism in August, only to leave their fans disappointed in December.

So, will changes in education - or at KASB - have the same effect? The answer lies west of Topeka, not east. In Manhattan, a guy named Bill Snyder has had some success with a mantra of getting better every day, not every year. His success comes not from August hype, but from the daily grind of looking at one’s self every single day and asking what can I do today to be better than I was yesterday.

Here’s to a great 2013, entered with the undying optimism of a fanitus-afflicted Chiefs/Jayhawk fan, and driven by the daily commitment of a Bill Snyder-admiring grinder.
KASB compiles responses from advocacy tours

About 400 school leaders and a few state officials attended 24 meetings held across Kansas in June during the KASB 2013 Advocacy Tour. This year’s meetings focused on three key topics: (1) school finance and state revenues; (2) academic standards and testing; and (3) school board collective bargaining with teachers.

KASB staff compiled participant responses from survey questions on each of these topics. The results have been summarized by Associate Executive Director Mark Tallman on the Tallman Education Report Blog.

Results were shared with the KASB Legislative Committee July 13. The committee meets again on August 24, to develop recommendations for the KASB Delegate Assembly on KASB advocacy positions for the 2014 Legislature. KASB members are urged to contact committee members or KASB staff prior to the August meeting with opinions and suggestions. A list of committee members is available on the KASB website www.kasb.org/legislativecomm.

Legislative Committee recommendations will be shared with KASB members in September and October during this fall’s regional meetings. Meetings begin September 24, and will be held in each of KASB’s 10 regions throughout the state. Watch for more information, coming soon!

The Legislative Committee will consider feedback, data collected during the regional meetings and additional information when it finalizes its recommendations on November 2. The KASB Delegate Assembly will vote on positions November 8, as part of the annual KASB convention in Wichita.

Legislative Post Audit Committee, Legislative Coordinating Council meet

The Legislative Post Audit Committee met July 24, and accepted the third and final of three school district efficiency audits performed during the 2012-13 school year. The audit covered Kansas City USD 500. The district was the “big” district audit directed by a budget proviso at the end of the 2012 Session.

In March, the committee heard audits of a mid-size district, Cherokee USD 247, and a small district, St. Francis USD 297. All three audits can be found at www.kslpa.org/all_reports.php.

The committee also accepted the “K-12 Education: Survey of Efficiency Measures Taken by Kansas School Districts,” though little time was spent on the report. It can be found at the same website listed above.

The majority of the committee’s time was spent discussing the eight key findings reported in the executive summary of the Kansas City USD 500 audit. Six findings were designated as having little or no impact on students or the community, moderate impact and significant impact. The other two findings related to the district’s efficiency management process and district accounting policies and practices.

Dr. Cynthia Lane, superintendent of Kansas City USD 500, addressed the committee after the auditor covered the report. She started her remarks by saying undergoing the audit “keeps with our belief in transparency and openness.” She then provided detailed responses to questions committee members had asked of the auditor.

The committee had the opportunity to order other audits, and one of the possibilities was to investigate the efficiency of all K-12 non-instructional spending. However, the committee did not select that as an audit topic.

LCC approves two days for education interim

The Legislative Coordinating Council met Monday, July 29. It approved 37 days of interim committee meetings, including two for education. Although neither the chair nor committee members were announced, it appears the chair will be a House member. The identified topics are school funding resources and reviewing funding formulas from other states.

Much of the conversation was about adding two days of committee meeting for reviewing gubernatorial appointments that will need to be made during the special session, slated to start September 3. The committee also made decisions about staff levels for the special session. Few committees will be staffed and only leadership will have their offices staffed.

THANK YOU!

KASB holds many meetings across the state of Kansas during the year. We wouldn’t be able to do that without the support of Kansas school districts and other entities. KASB would like to say thank you to the following that hosted a meeting in the last year:

- Arkansas City USD 470
- Colby USD 315
- Concordia USD 333
- Dodge City USD 443
- Emporia USD 253
- ESSDACK
- Garden City USD 457
- Great Bend USD 428
- Greenbush: Southeast Kansas Education Service Center
- Hays USD 489
- Hiawatha USD 415
- Independence USD 446
- Iola USD 257
- Kansas City USD 500
- Lawrence USD 497
- Leavenworth USD 453
- Liberal USD 480
- Newton USD 373
- Nickerson USD 309
- Northwest Kansas Education Service Center
- Northwest Kansas Technical College
- Olathe USD 233
- Paola USD 368
- Pittsburg USD 250
- Pratt USD 382
- Smoky Hill Education Service Center
- South Central Kansas Education Service Center
- Turner-Kansas City USD 202
- Valley Center USD 262
- Wichita USD 259
Leading a school district from a systems perspective

KASB leadership services staff have been involved in many great discussions about school improvement these past few weeks as they have traveled around the state working with boards, superintendents and principals. From trainings on boardsmanship and strategic planning to working with district administrators focused on McREL’s Balanced Leadership and Evaluations, a common theme is apparent: School districts that are using a big picture, systems approach to student achievement are starting to see the benefits of their efforts.

So what does leadership of a school district look and feel like when done from a systems perspective?

Alignment

Alignment is often referred to when we talk about curriculum and instruction. We focus on gaps or redundancies within the system which result in unprepared students. This alignment is critical for students, but to impact the work happening in classrooms there is alignment that also must reflect the board’s vision.

- The board sets a vision and adopts policy consistent with the needs and expectations of the school district stakeholders.
- The district administrative team - along with the board - aligns actions and resources to make that vision happen.
- Then building administrators and teachers work within an established framework to focus on the necessary steps to accomplish the vision set by the board.

The results? Consistent expectations throughout the system around instruction and achievement, and common vocabulary and processes within the system that create a defined sense of the work to be done.

Leadership teams engaged in continual learning

Peter Senge in his “Fifth Discipline” book discussed the three critical dimensions of team learning:

1. Teams must think insightfully about complex issues. What is your process for asking the right questions to engage your team in some critical thinking about current issues in education?
2. There is the need for innovative, coordinated action. How does your system inspire innovation to meet the needs of a changing student and community population?
3. You must continually foster the development with other learning teams to develop with the organization. What structures are established to develop a collaborative culture between building principals and teachers focused on student success?

Systemic monitoring and evaluation

How do we know if we are making progress if we never look at where we are going? School districts have to develop a culture around monitoring, reviewing and evaluating all aspects of the system. KASB encourages leaders to formalize a process to frequently revisit goals and outcomes to determine if they are tracking towards the desired vision.

School districts consistently establish goals that clarify what they would like to accomplish, but often they are overlooked in the day to day challenges of running a school system. It is important that leaders maintain constant focus on the mission and goals.

Outreach

When a district has a clear sense of why they exist and where they want to be in the future, advocating for support and resources within your community becomes an easier ‘sell.’ The recent controversy surrounding the “common core standards” is a perfect example of the importance of outreach. Educators did a wonderful job of sharing information and communicating within our circles.

We were much less effective when it came to the community, politicians, and other stakeholders about sharing our ideals and beliefs. As leaders we must “paint the picture” and share a vision of how each of our students benefit when the school district continues to improve and innovate.

Take the long view

As we are living through major shifts in the educational landscape, we start to focus on the individual initiatives and the timelines to get them implemented. If we are not careful, focusing on isolated initiatives leads us toward disconnected systems. The people impacted by the initiatives do not have the opportunity to understand how “it” fits within the overall direction of the system.

We have to continually assist individuals impacted by the initiative to step back and survey the horizon to show them where and how these changes merge towards the common vision and direction that has been established by the board. As educational leaders we must always take the time to explain “why” what we do is so important to our students. A clear understanding of the systems approach will benefit our schools and communities as we make decisions for the future.
KASB Presents Upcoming Training Opportunities:

School Safety and Security
September 5, 2013
KASB, Topeka

Student Discipline Seminar
September 12, 2013
KASB, Topeka

Find more information at www.kasb.org.

Register online by visiting www.kasb.org and click on the KASB Store tab or call 800.432.2471.