New assessments, move highlight September State Board meeting

Choosing a new program to replace the current system of state assessments for grades three through eight and once in high school was a major discussion of the September Kansas State Board of Education meeting.

The board is considering at least three options: (1) the new Smarter Balanced system being developed by a consortium of states, including Kansas; (2) contracting with an assessment vendor, such as the University of Kansas (which has handled the state testing program for 20 years) or ACT; or (3) a hybrid model that would allow districts to use either a state default system or an alternative system. A decision is expected by December.

The September meeting was the last at the current location that has been used for almost five decades. The board will hold its October meeting in the Statehouse; the following month’s meeting will be held in the State Department of Education’s new offices in the Landon State Office Building.

Other issues included:

A U.S. Department of Education monitoring team visited KSDE earlier in September. Kansas has received a waiver from many requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, but the federal department has said that waiver is at risk because the state has not fully complied with teacher and administrator evaluation requirements.

The state is developing a new program which will allow districts to make bus purchases and group fuel purchases.

Since 2002, all teacher’s license applicants have been required to submit fingerprints, but those already licensed were excluded from this requirement. The board will propose that 35,000 teachers licensed before 2002 would be required to be fingerprinted before renewing their licenses. Within five years, all teachers licensed in Kansas would have fingerprints on file. The board is also seeking ways to improve reporting from county and district attorneys when educators are involved in crimes.

Kansas is implementing the Jobs After Graduation (JAG) program in 25 high schools this year, with funding from the Department of Children and Families and support from the Communities in Schools program.

The board received a Legislative Communications Resource Toolkit on Kansas College and Career Standards along with an update from the board’s Communications Committee.

Find the KSDE summary of the meeting online at http://bit.ly/14Ifyfa.

KASB Regional Nominating committees appointed, candidates wanted

Regional Nominating Committees have been named in five KASB Regions where Regional Vice President elections are to be held December during the KASB Annual Convention in Wichita, December 6-8, 2013.

Any interested school board member should contact a member of their Regional Nominating Committee to submit their name as a candidate for that Regional Vice President’s position.

Region 4 committee members are: Bonnie Smith, Royal Valley USD 337; Tom Brungardt, Geary County USD 475; and Randy Hubbard, Washington Co. USD 108.

Region 5 committee members are: Nedra Elbl, Salina USD 305; Josh Michaels; Lyons USD 405; and Marti White, Morris County USD 417.

Region 6 committee members are: Melinda Fritze, Andover USD 385; Rhonda Price, Valley Center USD 262; and Gail Sawyer, Winfield USD 465.

Region 8 committee members are: Bernard Juno, Otis-Bison USD 403; Gemma Austin, Stafford USD 349; and Tammy Schrag, Kingman-Norwich USD 331.

Region 10 committee members are: Tim Cruz,
Eat your veggies-learn your standards

How many times have you been a frustrated participant in the following conversation?
Child: “I don’t like it!” Parent: “Have you tried it?” Child: “NO! It looks gross.” When my kids were younger, a common game we played was to see what one of them would eat, and for how much. I think the highest price I ever paid was $25 to see my oldest eat a bite of mushroom quiche. He is probably still traumatized by the experience, although I notice they still enjoy playing the game with their friends. To my wife’s frustration, I still will not eat brussel sprouts because my dad once made me eat one of these grotesque miniature cabbages that bear a strong resemblance to a road apple.

The education community is currently engaged in a frustrating game of a similar kind. Three years ago the Kansas State Board of Education adopted the Common Core Standards after deliberation and public hearings. Educators across the state eyed them after deliberation and public hearings. The Kansas State Board of Education adopted the Common Core Standards three years ago. Three years later the standards are under attack for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons tend toward the political and not the educational. My purpose here is to ask everyone to take a step back and try them, you might like them.

It is easy to do. Just go to the KSDE website at http://bit.ly/15lONlo for the math standards. Go to http://bit.ly/1apmM8l to see what students are expected to know and be able to do. I find the math standards to be more user friendly, so let’s take a look at an example. I randomly scrolled and landed on fourth grade math, operations and algebraic concepts:

**Operations and Algebraic Thinking 4.OA**

Use the four operations with whole numbers to solve problems.

1. **Interpret a multiplication equation as a comparison, e.g., interpret 5 × 7 as a statement that 5 is 7 times as many as 7 and 7 times as many as 5. Represent verbal statements of multiplicative comparisons as multiplication equations.**

2. **Multiply or divide to solve word problems involving multiplicative comparison, e.g., by using drawings and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem, distinguishing multiplicative comparison from additive comparison.**

3. **Solve multistep word problems posed with whole numbers and having whole-number answers using the four operations, including problems in which remainders must be interpreted. Represent these problems using equations with a letter standing for the unknown quantity. Assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies including rounding.**

Now consider the educational goal of having students prepared for the workforce or college (in this case in eight years). Does this standard represent knowledge and skills that are appropriately rigorous for a fourth grade student?

I will not try to answer the question for you. I will only ask you to try it before you decide that you don’t like it. Is it educationally sound and appropriate? My guess is most of the politicians who are holding court on the standards haven’t even sniffed the actual standards, but I could be wrong. Our job as education leaders is to learn the facts and make decisions based upon them. Try it, you might like it, and I don’t think you will need to reach for the Alka-Selzer afterwards.

Oh, and don’t be looking for me to give you $25 for the effort.

Opening and closing dates of school: 2013-14 school year

Deciding when to start and end school this year is complicated for some districts by adopting a shorter school year calendar as an economy measure in this difficult financial time, and by the placement of Labor Day and Memorial Day a bit early. This school year, the first Monday in September occurred on September 2, 2013, and the last Monday in May occurs on May 26, 2014.

The shortening of school calendars due to financial pressure on schools is reflected in the start dates for this school year. Some districts are opening after Labor Day, and one of those is closing school next spring at the end of April to allow time to complete a capital project prior to the 2014-15 school year. Some districts believe that later starting dates will decrease utility bills and others may be starting later due to fewer total days in the calendar this school year. Barely half (51.4 percent) of Kansas districts will start more than two weeks before Labor Day, down from 84 percent just four years ago. More districts will be starting less than a week before Labor Day. Two years ago, 95 percent of districts and 99 percent of the students were up and going more than a week before the holiday. This year, 259 districts and 96.6 percent of students will be in school over a week before Labor Day.

This full KASB Research Bulletin is not being mailed but is available in “pdf” format on the KASB website in the members only area. Log on and go to Advocacy/Research, Research, Research Publications. For detailed printouts of the districts starting and ending school on each date (also available on the website), or for additional copies of this report, call the KASB Research Department at 800-432-2471 or email research@kasb.org
Avoiding serial meetings; email conversations may violate KOMA

Charles Percy Snow was quoted in the March 15, 1971, edition of the New York Times as saying, “Technology… is a[n] [odd] thing. It brings you great gifts with one hand, and it stabs you in the back with the other.” Many of our members have experienced this very love/hate relationship, and some of the most treacherous technological waters lie with serial meetings under the Kansas Open Meetings Act. As many of you know, the act, commonly referred to as KOMA or the Kansas Sunshine Laws, was designed to ensure government business is conducted in the open where interested citizens have access to the proceedings and the written records of the public body. Prior to the law’s passage, school boards could conduct their business behind closed doors, and this aura of secrecy created distrust in school board decisions on the part of parents, patrons, and staff. So, even though your board meetings might not be held in front of throngs of adoring fans now, it is reassuring for many citizens to know that your school board, like other public bodies, is practicing transparency in governance.

Keep in mind that this transparency may also attach to your email communications among board members. K.S.A. 75-4317a defines a “meeting” for KOMA purposes to mean “any gathering or assembly in person or through the use of a telephone or any other medium for interactive communication by a majority of the membership of a body or agency subject to this act for the purpose of discussing the business or affairs of the body or agency.”

Thus, to qualify as a meeting under KOMA, three things must take place.

- First, there must be some type of interactive communication. Interactive communication would include, but may not be limited to, e-mails, chat rooms, instant messaging, and text messages.
- Second, the communication must include a majority of the membership of the board. With seven members on the board, four or more members would constitute a majority.
- Third, the majority of the board must be discussing school business.

All three elements of a meeting must be met to constitute a meeting under KOMA.

In 2008, amendments were made to KOMA in order to clarify when serial meetings are subject to KOMA’s openness requirement. Serial meetings must be open to the public if:

- They collectively involve a majority of the membership of the board;
- They share a common topic of discussion concerning the business affairs of the school board, and
- They are intended by any or all of the participants to reach agreement on a matter that would require binding action to be taken by the board.

The important thing to remember about a serial meeting is that a majority of members do not have to be present at one time nor do all of the communications have to take place at one time. As long as four or more board members are involved in the communications at some point in time, there is a common topic of discussion, and an agreement is reached, a serial meeting has taken place and must be open to the public to avoid a KOMA violation.

To avoid situations where the board may be exposed to fines under KOMA, we strongly suggest that board members funnel email communications about board topics through the superintendent or be sure never to involve more than two other board members in email communications. At all costs, avoid the temptation to “reply all” and engage the whole board in a dialogue about school business outside of a board meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the Kansas Open Meetings Act or serial meetings, please contact one of KASB’s attorneys at 1-800-432-2471.

KASB receptionist retires Nov. 1; new receptionists begin

Tudi Brichacek, KASB receptionist since August 2005, is retiring effective November 1. Tudi has been the main voice to greet members calling and visiting KASB for the past nine years. Please join KASB in wishing Tudi well by sending cards to her attention at KASB, 1420 SW Arrowhead Rd, Topeka, Kan. 66604.

As you call and visit the KASB office during the next month you’ll notice two new voices/faces. Nancy Hutzell and Shaneice McNabney joined the KASB staff on Friday, September 26, as the new receptionists. You’ll find Nancy in the office and manning phones and the front desk in the mornings. Shaneice will be take care of the afternoons. Please be patient with them as they learn the routine, phone system and where to route calls!
KASB/American Fidelity Workshop: Free Rider Penalty

The Health Care Reform Free Rider Penalty (also called the “play or pay mandate” or “employer shared responsibility” provision) requires large employers to offer adequate and affordable health coverage to full-time employees and their dependent children beginning in 2015 (“play”) or potentially pay a penalty (“pay”). Although recent guidance has delayed the Free Rider Penalty effective date to 2015, the fact that the premium tax credits and the individual mandate will become effective in 2014 means that employers will not completely avoid the Free Rider Penalty requirements. This interactive workshop will help employers answer the following questions, among others: Am I considered a large employer? How do I know if the coverage I offer is considered affordable? How do I track hours worked by variable hour employees? Substitute teachers?

Find out more and register at www.kasb.org

Look for Convention registration and lodging information on the KASB website!