January is School Board Recognition Month

Across the state, almost 2,000 Kansans work tirelessly to strengthen their communities and the future of the state by serving on school boards.

They do it for no pay and at great personal sacrifice, spending hours at meetings and researching and studying issues so Kansas students will succeed in life.

School board members usually get little recognition, but the month of January has been set aside for observance of School Board Member Recognition Month.

Recently, Gov. Sam Brownback signed a proclamation that says the Kansas Constitution entrusts maintenance, development and operation of the state’s public education system to the locally elected school boards. Brownback called on citizens to recognize the dedication and commitment of local school board members.

During the signing ceremony with KASB board members, Brownback also urged school board members to speak with their legislators about education issues.

KASB has assembled a number of resources that can help in the recognition of school boards online at www.kasb.org/thankboe.

2015 Session begins

As legislators convened the 2015 Legislative Session, they faced a budget crisis and school funding crisis.

Will they and Gov. Sam Brownback come together on a plan that puts the state on sound financial and educational footing? The next few months will tell.

KASB’s legislative recommendations and positions can be found at www.kasb.org/assets/Advocacy/FinalDARes2014.pdf

Because of the tax cuts enacted by Gov. Brownback, elected officials must deal with revenue shortfalls in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, and the next one, which starts July 1.

For the current fiscal year, the state faces a $279 million revenue shortfall.

Gov. Brownback has proposed diverting funds from the state pension system and highway plan to help bridge the budget gap, but that pushes more funding problems into the next fiscal year, creating a $648 million shortfall out of an approximately $6 billion budget.

The state cannot run a deficit, so that means spending cuts, raising more revenue or a combination of the two actions must be taken.

Spending on public schools makes up approximately half of the state budget, but Gov. Brownback has promised to protect school funding.

...continued on page 2
The K-12 Student Performance and Efficiency Commission declined to recommend any changes to the Professional Negotiations Act.

The decision came as several education groups, including KASB, have been in discussions about proposed changes.

The K-12 Commission, in wrapping up its business, recommended legislation that would require every school district have an annual compliance audit. An amendment added to the proposal by Dr. Jim Hinson, superintendent of Shawnee Mission USD 512, would require the Legislature to provide the funding needed to conduct the audits.

And the commission clarified a recommendation that the Legislature address the issue of unencumbered balances in school districts and require a reasonable amount of carry forward balances. The commission said the balances should be considered in the light of what are good business practices.

For example, Hinson said a balance fund in the Shawnee Mission district may appear unusually large but in reality the district is setting aside money for future textbook purchases.

The K-12 Commission also proposed legislation that would set up an education standards study commission, and added that some of the members of the commission should represent educational interests. An earlier version did not include educational interests on the panel.

The report also included a minority report that did recommend legislation to limit the mandatory subjects of bargaining between school boards and teachers to compensation and hours worked. All other issues of bargaining currently in statute would become ‘permissive’ subject to mutual agreement of the negotiating parties. These include vacation, holiday, sick leave, retirement, insurance benefits, pay for overtime and numerous other issues.

The four members who signed the minority report on the nine-member panel are Commission Chairman Sam Williams, Dennis Depew, Mike O’Neal and Dave Trabert.

Jim McNiece, R-Wichita, was selected on a 8-2 vote as chair of the Kansas State Board of Education during its organizational meeting Tuesday. Carolyn Wims-Campbell, D-Topeka was selected vice chair on a 9-1 vote. Ken Willard, R-Hutchinson was appointed as legislative liaison and Deena Horst, R-Salina as assistant.

Wims-Campbell and Willard served on local school boards in Topeka and Nickerson before election to the State Board. McNiece was a long-time high school principal in Wichita and Horst taught art in Salina.

In other action items, the board approved new standards for professional education, counselors and agriculture education. The board also approved appointments to the Professional Standards Board.

Informational items included updates on the development of a new accreditation system, the Kansas migrant education program, implementation of the Kansas College and Career Ready Science Standards and the recently concluded K-12 Performance and Efficiency Commission.

Also on the school front, last month a three-judge panel declared Kansas was under-funding schools and the finance system was unconstitutional.

The judges didn’t order legislators to increase funding by a specific amount but suggested an increase in base state aid per pupil that would total $548 million more per year. The decision is expected to be appealed to the Kansas Supreme Court.

In response to the three-judge panel’s ruling, Gov. Brownback and other Republican legislative leaders have said the school finance formula needs an overhaul but no details have emerged on that.

Another issue that legislators will tackle is a an effort by Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a Republican, and the Kansas Republican Party to move non-partisan school board and city elections from spring to the November ballot and make the races partisan.

Kobach says the move will increase voter turnout in those races. But opponents say it will increase the politicalization of local government, confuse voters with long ballots and reduce the availability of information about the local races because they will be overwhelmed by the state and national races.

KASB opposes the proposal to move the elections and make them partisan. No school board or local governmental unit has sought to move the election dates or make them partisan races.

In addition, legislators have been handed the work of the K-12 Student Performance and Efficiency Commission that met during the interim.

The Commission recommended legislation that would require every school district to have an annual compliance audit and establishing an education standards study commission.
Guide to the 2015 Legislative Session

Keeping up with developments in the Statehouse during the Legislative Session is a daunting task even for people who are physically there.

Here is a list of resources that can be used to try to keep up with what the Legislature is up to this session.

www.kasb.org has a calendar of upcoming education hearings, a status of legislative education activity, testimony, an archive of news briefs and more! Just go to kasb.org and click on the “Advocacy Services” tab.

http://kslegislature.org/li/ is the Kansas Legislature’s website where you can track legislation, get contact information of legislators and generally follow the goings-on of the session. This website also provides links to listen to live proceedings of the House and Senate.

The Kansas State Library also welcomes questions about state government and legislation. Here is its contact information: 800-432-3919 or 785-296-2149; Legislative Hotline: 800-432-3924.

And for a wrap up of the weekly activities of the session, KASB’s Weekly Legislative Webinars at 12:30 p.m. every Friday will cover the main issues pertaining to education and previewing what’s on tap for the next week. Go to www.myvsl.com/kasb153 after 11:45 a.m. on Fridays unless otherwise noted.

If you are on Twitter, follow @kasbtopeka and KASB advocacy staff Mark Tallman, Tom Krebs and Scott Rothschild. Here are their twitter handles: @tallman_mark @TomKrebs1 and @srothschild1.

You might also follow members of the Statehouse Press Corps on Twitter. Here are their handles: @jshormanCJ @BryanLowry3 @bradc25 @APjdhanna @lwphancock @TimVCarpenter @kprkoranda @DionKansas @CeliaLJ

If you don’t want to create a Twitter account you can use fast follow on your phone to receive Twitter updates without having to sign up or add your phone to a Twitter account. Go to https://support.twitter.com/articles/20170004-fast-following-on-sms to learn how!

The election is over, the votes are counted and the 2015 Legislative Session will soon be underway.

Public school advocates have their work cut out for them. Tight, even shrinking budgets, growing enrollments, higher expectations and a contentious political environment will make for a challenging legislative session for everyone. Public schools and their supporters must learn to take effective action on behalf of Kansas public school students and inspire others to speak up!

Put together a team of advocates, including both school and community leaders, then come to Topeka January 22 and 23, 2015. Working together Kansans can support ‘Successful Students, the Kansas Way!’

Capitol Plaza Hotel, Topeka, Kansas Special team rate! Register three get four and more free!
Searching for social media solutions for your district? Trying to figure out the pro’s and con’s of Facebook vs. Twitter? Or maybe you know you need to jump in and get started in your personal or school’s social media journey, but just aren’t sure how to get started. Join us Feb. 3, 2015 in Topeka for a full day workshop facilitated by Inman USD 448 Superintendent Kevin Case @ InmanSuperC. Come prepared for a fast day of interactive fun and learning!

Who should attend?
Board members, administrators, school staff, community members! Individuals and teams! Put together a diverse team of stakeholders and dedicate some time to developing your social media vision, policies, procedures and presence.

Find out more and register online at www.kasb.org/power