Bill moving elections advances in Senate

A Senate committee has recommended approval of a bill that would move school board and city elections from the spring to fall of odd-numbered years, and keep the races non-partisan.

But based on the comments from members of the Senate Ethics and Elections Committee, there will be attempts during the Legislative Session to make the races partisan and move them to the fall of even-numbered years.

As amended in committee, Senate Bill 171 would also require that school districts provide, at the request of election officials, buildings for polling places.

Initially as introduced, the bill would have put school board and city elections in the fall of even-numbered years and made them partisan.

Senate President Susan Wagle, R-Wichita, offered the amendment to put the local elections in odd-numbered years and keep them non-partisan.

“I feel like it is a good compromise,” Wagle said. But she added, “We can continue discussions on making races partisan.”

Sen. Steve Fitzgerald, R-Leavenworth, said he also thought partisan elections in even-numbered years should be explored, but said Wagle’s amendment represented a compromise.

A measure to move elections was also in the House.

Supporters of moving the elections say it will increase voter participation.

KASB supports leaving the school board election system as it is now, saying the spring election cycle gives voters a chance to focus on school issues.

See you at the Capitol! by Rod Stewart, KASB President

At the recent Washington D.C. Advocacy Institute, a couple speakers mentioned stakeholders in education need to be engaged in the legislative process. Parents, board members, teachers and students all need to be involved. After hearing that, the Board of Directors started to brainstorm ways to make that happen in Kansas.

Dayna [Miller, Basehor-Linwood USD 458, KASB Region 2 Vice President] and I took students to the Statehouse on February 11. We also had numerous board members, superintendents, and community members there to attend the Elections hearing. The day was very well received by everyone, including the students! I have had more requests from board members wanting to bring their students.

We are starting “Wednesdays at the Statehouse”! There is a lot of activity and we need to have a presence every week. We will try to have a planned activity, but we can accomplish a lot by just being there and promoting public education. You can always attend whatever day works best, we are just trying to have an organized effort. Be sure to let KASB know when you plan to attend.

I would ask those groups that attend wear attire with your school district name on it, then everyone knows why we are there!
Partisan elections in school board races would limit military members

Making local elections partisan would prohibit many military service members from running for office or holding elective office, according to the legal staff of the Adjutant General of Kansas.

Currently, city and school board elections are non-partisan and held in the spring of odd-numbered years. A Senate committee has recommended approval of Senate Bill 171, which would hold the city and school board elections in November of even-numbered years and keep the races non-partisan.

But the Kansas Republican Party and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach have urged the Legislature to approve legislation to make city and school board elections partisan and move the elections to November of even-numbered years. It is expected that amendments to SB 171 to make local elections partisan and in November of even-numbered years will be considered when the full Senate takes up the bill.

Active duty service members would be prohibited from running for election in any partisan race, according to federal law, the Adjutant General of Kansas office said.

In addition, making school board elections partisan would place additional limits on active duty service members, including Active Guard Reserve or Active Guard Reserve members serving in the Kansas National Guard from being able to hold elective office, according to Capt. Marci Solander, executive officer to the Adjutant General of Kansas.

There are a number of restrictions on the political activities of U.S. military service members and federal, state and local government employees, according to a legal analysis by KASB. Those limits are outlined by the federal Hatch Act and U.S. Department of Defense Directives.

Legislature spending lots of time on PNA

The Kansas Legislature is spending a lot of time trying to change the Professional Negotiations Act, which governs bargaining between school boards and teachers.

Both the House and Senate education committees have approved bills that make compensation and hours worked the only mandatory negotiable items between school boards and teachers. Other items could be discussed if agreed to by both sides. The proposals are contained in House Bill 2034 and Senate Bill 136.

Initially, SB 136 contained a compromise position that was agreed to by KASB, United School Administrators, Kansas National Education Association and Kansas School Superintendents Association.

That bill would have made mandatory negotiations on compensation and hours and then allowed each side to pick five additional items from the current list of mandatory items. Additional items could have been added if agreed to by both sides.

But the Senate Education Committee rejected that proposal and amended the more limiting bill on a 6-5 vote.

Meanwhile, the House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development Committee has approved House Bill 2326 which would remove the exclusive bargaining right of a teacher group and allow individual teachers to negotiate with school boards.

KASB opposed the bill saying school leaders believe that individual teacher negotiations would be burdensome. The measure would also preclude negotiations on topics other than compensation and that runs afoul of the compromise with other groups.

In addition, there are two other bills in the Senate that would limit negotiations.

Bill would require parental consent for students to take sex ed

A bill that would require written parental consent for a student to take a sex education class has been advanced by a House committee.

House Bill 2199 was recommended on a 10-8 vote.

Currently school districts are allowed to develop either a policy where students must opt-in or opt-out of sex ed classes.

Under the bill, a district would only be able to use an opt-in policy. KASB opposed this bill, saying districts should decide which policy to pick.

Shawnee Mission USD 512 seeks to intervene in school finance lawsuit

The Shawnee Mission USD 512 school board has voted to file a motion to intervene in the school finance lawsuit.

Last month, Schools for Fair Funding, a coalition of school districts challenging state school funding, asked the Kansas Supreme Court to re-open a portion of the case because those districts said the state is reneging on required funding to equalize funds for districts with lower per-pupil tax revenue.

Shawnee Mission officials said that challenge by Schools for Fair Funding could have an adverse impact on funding to their district.

“We are concerned regarding the potential impact of the remedies that may be sought from this latest argument,” said Shawnee Mission Superintendent Jim Hinson. “If the court grants our motion, it will allow us to ensure our interests are adequately represented because they currently are not fairly represented by the parties involved in the lawsuit. The requested relief is antagonistic to our students and many other students across the state,” he said.
HEIM: I’m From Kansas:

Should Service Members Be Allowed to Serve?
SB 171

How many of you remember learning about the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in American History class? The subject caught my attention only because I recall my grandmother (a well-known embellisher but great story-teller) describing an incident involving the local sheriff, some WPA trees, and a relative. For the sake of family reputation I will not go into any details.

The WPA is important today only because the origin of the Hatch Act lies with some indiscretions committed with WPA employees. Rest assured these kinds of high-level shenanigans were above any of my relatives’ abilities or interests. Furthermore, they were alleged to have been committed by Democrats and, as the blog title infers, I come from a long line of Republicans.

Clear back in 1938 some politicians used the WPA jobs as patronage in exchange for votes. Hard to believe, I know, that politicians would do such a thing. As a result, Congress passed the Hatch Act. The Act has been tinkered with over the past 80 years or so, but remains true to its essence in that it forbids employees of the federal executive branch from engaging in partisan political activity. Similar rules also apply to members of the military.

Why do we care about 80-year-old legislation here in Kansas now? For the second year in a row, legislation (SB 171) has been introduced to make school and city elections partisan. There are many reasons why this is a bad idea, but the biggest one is that it eliminates a large group of citizens from serving their local communities: members of the U.S. Military and Federal Employees. Currently, members of the military and other federal government employees can serve on local school boards and city commissions because these elections are non-partisan. According to the State Smart Website, there are 61,773 federal employees in Kansas. Over half of these jobs, about 36,000 are military personnel. Under the suggested legislation (SB 171) none of these Kansas citizens could run for local partisan elections. But the Hatch Act is more expansive than just direct employees. Any person whose salary is paid for in whole or in part by federal funds is subject to the prohibition on partisan activities. Cases have been brought against persons running for office for such tangential relationships as receiving federal funds to purchase bulletproof vests for local sheriff officers. If local elections are made partisan, it is impossible to predict just how many Kansans would be eliminated from candidacy for local office because of these broad interpretations of the law.

It is also impossible to say how many people who have already been elected by local voters would no longer be able to serve based upon the provisions of the Hatch Act. The Topeka Capital Journal recently ran one veterans story.

In my opinion, one military service member being removed from his local school board just because he serves his country is too many.

Some of our legislators disagree. Some of you will remember the 70s when the voting age was changed from 21 to 18 because young men who were serving in Vietnam were old enough to serve, but not old enough to vote. Is SB 171 a strange contradiction to that 1970s change that seems to imply good enough to serve, but not good enough to serve?

I hope you, and your communities will take the time to let your local legislator know how you feel about SB 171.

[Pictured: School Board Member Aaron Estabrook, Manhattan USD 383]

KSDE sets guidelines regarding mentoring programs for new teachers, principals

Recently KSDE sent out a survey to district leaders requesting information from districts regarding their readiness to implement mentor programs for the 2015-16 school year. There are explanations of the guidelines that can be found here.

Districts will be required to meet these guidelines for the mentoring of new teachers and principals for the 2015-16 school year. These guidelines are intended to provide a structure to ensure that quality mentoring is occurring for teachers new to the profession and principals new to the position. Some frequent questions that have come up regarding the mentoring guidelines:

Who is required to receive mentoring in accordance with these guidelines?
All new teachers and school specialists, all new school leaders hired under an initial license, this includes building principals, assistant principals and district level leaders.

Can districts use other entities or associations to provide their mentoring program?
Yes, as long as the programs provided by these groups meet the guidelines outlined at the link above and are approved through KSDE.

What are my steps now as a district to prepare for the mentoring requirement?
Familiarize yourself with the guidelines, and evaluate your current mentoring structure. KSDE will be requesting more information regarding your mentoring plan for 2015-16, coming up in March, so be looking for that request.
Board of KASB Workers Compensation Fund issues another refund to members

The Board of Trustees of the KASB Workers Compensation Fund has issued another refund to its members.

The refund is for a portion of the special contribution collected for the 2004-05 school year. The KASB Workers Compensation Fund is the only insurance pool in Kansas to have issued a refund of supplemental contributions.

In a letter to Fund members, Liz Maisberger-Clark, administrator of the Fund, said, “Let me say that we truly appreciate your continued participation in the Fund. Together we are stronger! And it is the strength of the Fund that allows us to offer competitive rates for workers compensation insurance that specializes in supporting Kansas public schools!”

The Fund was established in 1987 to provide KASB members workers compensation insurance. No eligible member has ever been denied coverage, nor has any member been non-renewed due to excessive losses.

The Fund is administered by KASB with an in-house claims department. It is governed by a separate Board of Trustees of locally-elected board of education members.

Nominations for 2014-15 Leadership for Tomorrow Program Due March 13

The Kansas Association of School Boards is accepting nominations for the Leadership for Tomorrow Class of 2015-2016.

Any past graduate of the program can nominate colleagues for the program and individuals can self-nominate. Once nominated, an application and further instructions will be sent to the nominee.

Nominations are due by March 13, 2015, and announcement of selection will be made by April 17, 2015.

Through five two-day sessions, the KASB Leadership for Tomorrow program creates a greater understanding of the Kansas public education system and provides opportunities to developing leadership skills for effective governance and raising student achievement.

The program is open to any KASB member district’s school board member or school administrator. Participation is limited. You can see more information about the KASB Leadership for Tomorrow program at www.kasb.org/LFT.

For further information or to nominate a colleague, please contact Carol Pitts, KASB assistant executive director for public relations and marketing, cpitts@kasb.org or call 800.432.2471.

Getting involved in KASB

We need you! And the best part about it? You and your district or organization will benefit!

By networking and building relationships throughout the state, you will enhance your effectiveness on your local governing board and expand your influence at the state level. Plus you will be contributing to KASB’s role as an advocate for all kids in Kansas!

“Active members are the life-blood of KASB,” said John Heim, KASB executive director. “All our members have something to offer through their own unique experiences and perspectives.”

KASB’s governance structure relies on active participation by members. Opportunities exist throughout the year, for short-term appointments to ad hoc committees to more long-term commitments for standing committees (usually subject to term limits) and governing boards.

To learn more, see www.kasb.org/informedinvolved or contact Kathy Tallman, KASB executive assistant, ktallman@kasb.org, 800-432-2471.
Lessons Learned from NSBA’s 2015 Advocacy Institute

Student advocacy year-round commitment

Student advocacy is a year-round commitment, and the work needs to be done before the votes are taken are just two key points brought back by the KASB delegation attending NSBA’s Advocacy Institute Feb 1-3 in Washington, D.C.

Kansas board of education members participating were: Keith Becker, Canton-Galva USD 419; Becky Billigmeir, Turner USD 202; Gail Billman, Labette Co. USD 506, KASB Region 3 vice-president; Lori Blake, Southeast of Saline USD 306, KASB Region 5 vice-president; Frank Henderson, Seaman USD 345, KASB immediate past-president; Judy Lair, Woodson USD 366, NSBA regional director, Western Region; Amy Martin, Olathe USD 233, KASB president-elect designee; Gina McGowan, Ellsworth USD 327, KASB Region 7 vice-president; Dayna Miller, Basehor-Linwood USD 458, KASB Region 1 vice-president; Daren Reese, Arkansas City USD 470; Don Shimkus, Oxford USD 358, KASB president-elect; Janet Sprecker, Derby USD 260; and Rod Stewart, Washington Co. USD 108, KASB president. KASB staff members John Heim, executive director; and Tom Krebs, advocacy specialist, also attended.

“There were lots of good ideas about building relationships with lawmakers and community members,” Turner board of education member Becky Billigmeir said.

The annual NSBA advocacy event included two days of briefings and advocacy training. Special presentations included members of the NSBA staff; political activities, authors and husband and wife James Carville and Mary Matalin; and Gwen Ifill, managing editor of Washington Week and co-anchor of PBS New Hour. The KASB delegation also participated in training on preparing for Capitol Hill meetings and session on legal, legislative and public advocacy issues.

The last day was spent visiting Capitol Hill. The Kansas team visited all six offices of the Kansas delegation and were able to meet with Senator Jerry Moran, R-Manhattan; Rep. Lynn Jenkins, R-Topeka, 2nd Congressional District and Rep. Kevin Yoder, R-Overland Park, 3rd Congressional district. The KASB team met with the staff of Senator, Pat Roberts, R-Dodge City; Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Wichita; and Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Hutchinson.

The team was prepared to discuss a number of key issues with the delegation, including:

- The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, specifically the most recent iteration, No Child Left Behind, which was due for reauthorization in 2007;
- The Individual with Disabilities Act, particularly trying to achieve full funding; and
- The Child Nutrition Act and its upcoming expiration.

“I was so impressed with the KASB delegation, so proud to sit in our meetings with our Senators and Representatives, listening to my peers speak so knowledgeably and passionately about the needs of Kansas kids. Our organization has some of the finest,” said Amy Martin, KASB president-elect designee.

KASB President Rod Stewart summed up his impressions with a call for all Kansans to engage in the process. “We need to get the stakeholders involved on the state and national levels. We need parent and student involvement!”

The KASB Delegation came away with several lasting impressions, providing a few key points to share with their fellow Kansas board members:

- Local school boards must ensure their schools are the first and best choice. No excuses: good governance for good schools.
- We are elected officials and it is our duty to work together with other elected officials to develop and agree on policy for the best educational programs.
- The work needs to be done before the votes are taken.
- Influence the influencers; close the door not the window; student advocacy is a year round responsibility and commitment.
- Going along to get along is not the road to success. Party lines don’t make change.
- We can’t afford to look away. Follow legislation.
- As elected officials, it is the power of our collective voices that affects change.
- There are many more politicians that are in favor of education than not.
- School board members are public officials who are elected by the same constituency as legislators. Speak from one elected official to another.
- Schools need better community relationships because we [boards] cannot do it all.
- Continue to tell our stories of success pertaining to education. Tell real stories to be heard.
- Adopt a reporter, take them inside what you do and give them enough information as you can.

Newsrooms have almost fully stopped covering local school boards for cost savings; social media connects the community.

[PIctured Left to Right: Judy Lair, Woodson USD 366, NSBA regional director, Western Region; Gail Billman, Labette Co. USD 506, KASB Region 3 vice-president; Frank Henderson, Seaman USD 345, KASB immediate past-president; and Rod Stewart, Washington Co. USD 108, KASB president]
Is LED lighting right for your schools? by Trane a KASB Prestigious Partner

The lighting industry, specifically the LED segment, is currently the “Wild Wild West” when it comes to new technologies and claims of performance. As an administrator or board member, where can you go to get the facts and not the sales pitch? Here are a few no-nonsense facts on proper LED systems and some general information on how to find the proper solution for each application and the benefits for your students and faculty.

Did you know over the last three years the cost of LED commercial lighting has dropped by more than two-thirds? Ultimately, what does all this mean for your district?

- LED Luminaires allow for a 50-70 percent reduction in energy usage over a properly illuminated fluorescent application. In some applications, a space retrofitted with LED Luminaires reduces the number of fixtures and creates a better lighting environment. This means SIGNIFICANT GENERAL FUND UTILITY RELIEF!!!

- LED Luminaires have more than triple or even quadruple the rated life of some fluorescent systems. LED is the only light source not diminished by on/off cycles. Imagine the maintenance cost savings of not needing to change a single bulb in an entire building for up to 20 years. The effect is far reaching from a materials cost standpoint to re-appropriating maintenance staff’s focus.

- LED Luminaires are dimmable. Typical fluorescent fixtures require additional items to make them dimmable. The ease of dimming and applying occupancy/vacancy controls to LED Luminaires make it a simple task to lower and raise lighting levels in classrooms and other instructional spaces.

- LED Luminaires contain no mercury like fluorescent systems. There are no hazardous materials contained in the fixtures that have to be cleaned up and recycled in a very specific manner.

- LED Luminaires are instant-on whereas fluorescent lights typically have a warm-up period to reach full lumen output.

- Fluorescent fixtures can create visual distraction. Fluorescent flickering is also known to be one of the main reasons for eye fatigue and fluorescent lights can in some cases cause headaches.

- LED Luminaires are constant light and have no “noise” associated with operation that some individuals may find annoying or distracting. There can be great benefits by removing this distraction in the learning environment.

- Most importantly, LED Luminaires allow you to improve the lighting quality of the space light years ahead of where it is today. We are able to demonstrate this fact using photometric models, CRI ratings and other industry recognized metrics.

Many manufacturers and installers often exaggerate performance of both energy and light quality. How are you, the consumer, able to sift through all the offerings to find the right solution? There are many sources within your grasp: IES, DLC, DOE LED facts label and on and on. The good news is that KASB and its Prestigious Partner Trane already have the lighting expertise to help you navigate through the maze of overrated and lesser quality products. Remember, not all LED lighting is equal.

Where to go from here: As with any significant lighting upgrade, the first step is assessing existing conditions and identifying performance requirements. Contact KASB’s Randy Weseman, assistant executive director for operations, rweseman@kasb.org or 800.432.2471 to schedule your free lighting assessment and explore how LED lighting will support your commitment to the learning environment through fiscal efficiency, green commitment and learner-focused environments for your students, staff and community.
A few quick tips for getting ready for newly elected board members

To do now:

- Assign a mentor for the new board members who will be elected in April.
- Be sure to check schedules so the mentors and other board members can attend the KASB New Board Member Workshop along with the superintendent. To encourage board teams, we are discounting the cost of mentors and other board members who attend. (Also note, exact dates will have to be confirmed once the new board member is elected.)
- Develop a curriculum and orientation plan/schedule. (KASB has a recommended curriculum available for review on our website.)

Within the week of the general election – April 6-10

- Call to verify contact information and preferred contact methods.
- Remind all board members elected on April 7 to file their oath of office by April 17.
- (Check with county election office for further details or call KASB legal staff.)
- Arrange for individual pictures.
- (Make the appointments now if using a professional photographer and offer to update any pictures for returning board members.)
- Add new board members to mailing lists/contact lists for newsletters, etc.
- Schedule and confirm with new board members the date/time/location of the initial meeting with the superintendent, board president and vice-president, and any other orientation sessions.
- Confirm with new board members the date/time/location of the KASB New Board Member Workshop they will attend and confirm schedule with the superintendent and other board members/mentor.
- Submit registrations for KASB’s New Board Member Workshop.
KASB affiliated insurance and KJUMP programs continue to bring significant value and service to our members. As budgets become tighter, it makes good "CENT$" to evaluate the costs of your insurance programs, including Workers Compensation, Property/Casualty and Student Accident insurances. KASB's Natural Gas Purchasing Consortium - KJUMP - is also a significant cost (and time) saver for those who participate. These programs are available only to our members, and our top priorities are providing the best coverage and the best service at competitive prices.