The March 2015 KASB Board of Directors meeting included a field trip to the North Central Kansas community of Washington. KASB President Rod Stewart and his wife, Kannette, hosted the two-day meeting, including a visit to their farming operation north of Washington.

The board and executive staff spent Friday afternoon learning about Washington USD 108’s schools and discussing the district’s unique opportunities and challenges with Superintendent Mike Stegman. USD 108’s official headcount enrollment for the 2014-15 school year is 357 and there are 389 square miles in the district. Lunch was prepared by students in the high school’s nutrition and wellness class, followed by a presentation on FCCLA and a tour of the school. The group then headed to the farm for more activities that culminated in a hayrack ride. That evening the group also heard a presentation by the school’s award-winning FFA program.

Saturday’s regular business meeting included a presentation by Donna Whiteman, assistant executive director/legal services. Whiteman gave an update on KASB legal services, including KASB negotiations support, the KASB Legal Assistance Fund and the role of the school board attorney.

President Stewart reported on the status of legislation that includes changes to the negotiations with professional staff. He noted the bill is now in Conference Committee, but passed the House with 109 votes and a unanimous vote in the Senate.

“In the end, the right thing was done,” Stewart said.

The bill is not yet final, and KASB will continue to monitor its status. Stewart said the four groups that worked out the proposed changes, KASB, KSSA, KNEA and USA Kansas, plan to continue meeting to keep the lines of communication open.

Board members reported on recent visits to Topeka, providing testimony and attending committee hearings. The increased presence of KASB membership is really making a difference, Stewart said.

KASB March Board Meeting includes field trip to Washington, Kansas

New school finance plan on fast track

A so-called block grant school finance formula was on the legislative fast-track and could be on Gov. Sam Brownback’s desk soon.

At press time, the bill was headed toward a floor debate in the House.

The measure would repeal the current school finance system and fund schools for two years at which time supporters of the bill said a permanent finance plan would be put in place.

The temporary formula would give school districts more flexibility in using their funds, supporters of the bill said.

But school officials from across the state and leaders of education organizations testified in opposition to the plan, saying it failed to provide adequate funding to all districts and especially shortchanged low wealth districts by cutting $51 million in assistance.

“We can think of no educational, constitutional, or moral reason for this action,” said Mark Tallman, associate executive director for advocacy for KASB.

The block grant plan was endorsed by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Kansas Policy Institute, and the tea party aligned Kansans for Liberty. Brownback has called for a block grant plan, saying the current formula was too complicated and designed to thwart accountability.

“Follow KASBTopeka on twitter and watch KASB.org for up-to-date information.”
Here we go again

Throwback Thursday: 
by: John Heim

Brian Jordan was waiting for the copy machine at the KASB offices and noticed a framed copy of the first volume of the Kansas School Boards Journal sitting on a shelf. Unlike the rest of us who walk by it countless times every day, Brian started to read Volume 1, Number 1, October 1930 of the KSBJ. He suggested that I read it, and what a gem it is.

George Allen, Jr, state superintendent of public instruction, extends his greetings and identifies the major issues of the time. He starts by establishing the importance of Kansas education for the entire state of Kansas and shares some data. I was surprised at some of the numbers:

- 1930
  - Students: 500,000
  - Teachers: 20,000
  - Board Members: 30,000

Who knew there were that many students, that few teachers, and wasn’t simply amazed at the number of board members? Those who think we have too many districts now would be shocked at the number we had 85 years ago, for about the same number of students. I was surprised at the number of teachers, until I considered the curriculum was severely limited and there were no special programs for special needs students.

Now that we know some numbers, what else was happening in 1930? Superintendent Allen considered the preeminent issue to be funding equalization. He asked that school board members “study (equalization) fearlessly without prejudice.” He was concerned that wealth disparity in the state caused some districts to be able to educate their students for less than one mill a year, while others had mill levies of over 60 mills.

He was also concerned about efficiency. He explained, “...in some cases where attendance is very small, or where other unfair conditions may exist it may be possible to transport to other schools.”

Superintendent Allen worried about equitable revenue sources as well. At the time there was no Kansas income tax and he advocated for an amendment to allow it. Over-reliance on property tax was of great concern to the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1930. He worried the country had changed since wealth was measured on how much property one owned and said, “80% of Kansas wealth is in intangibles,” not real property. He gave several examples of people who paid no tax because they didn’t own property, but had significant income. He said these people considered it unfair and wanted to pay their “fair share” for using public services.

In response to the issues identified, the superintendent offered a solution. Citing a group called the Tax Code Commission, he explained a Proposed Act for Allocating New Revenue For Schools. Today we might call this a school finance formula. Mr. Allen recognized and explained the different challenges in different districts and the impossibility of a simple allocation, as did the Commission. Their solution was complex and includes an equalization formula to share between districts, counties, and the state; a formula that controls for school size by allocating units of instruction based upon enrollment; assistance for districts with transporting students; and a mechanism to go above the base state funded instructional units.

Yogi Berra might say this is deja vu all over again. We should be careful about retreating to pre-1930 days with state revenue and school funding policies. The comparison of numbers at the beginning shows how much more complex education is today than in 1930. We should heed the advice of the editors of the Journal who said:

“While most problems of teaching must be worked out by educators, the financial problems of the schools should be worked out by those who are intrusted with the business management of school affairs. The school board members should be the best informed and their opinions should have the greatest weighting deciding any changes in the method of raising school revenue and in the distribution of that revenue.”

Yogi can say that again.
Finding Efficiencies

KASB has developed a number of partnerships that can provide districts with options to various district operation needs. In many cases your KASB membership gives you access to special programs and savings. Contact KASB for additional details.

INSURANCE

KASB’s Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. – Unique first-hand understanding of issues faced by public education. All claims are handled in-house by KASB-based staff.

Property/Casualty – Single source coverage and proven loss-cost containment. Endorsed program by KASB, provided by Wright Specialty Insurance. Broadest range of property and casualty coverage available, and the expertise of KASB staff to guide the bid and approval process!

Student Accident – The KASB-endorsed student accident coverage provides low deductible coverage for students, and fills the gap before KSHSAA mandatory coverage begins. Additional catastrophic coverage also is available.

Health Insurance – KASB is currently investigating a partnership to provide health insurance options for members.

KJUMP – This natural gas purchasing cooperative - in most cases -saves our members significant dollars.

KASB PARTNERSHIPS

- American Fidelity Assurance Company – Customized benefits and insurance.
- Trane – Global leader in energy and comfort solutions.
- PiperJaffray – Innovative financing solutions for new facilities and refinancing bond issues.
- k12tc – Better technology support at a lower cost.
- Opaal – Quality, cost effective food management system.
- BoardDocs – KASB-endorsed eGovernance solution for paperless board meetings.

With so much attention focused right now on what is happening in Topeka, it is easy to lose sight of all the support and services provided by KASB to our members. “Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success” isn’t just our motto, it’s our purpose!

Services supported by your dues include advocacy, lobbying, research, communications and association publications and information on special topics.

Advocacy – The KASB advocacy staff works with the Kansas Legislature, Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas congressional delegation and others on matters of concern.

Research – A comprehensive research and analysis department provides data collection on virtually every aspect of school district operations. The data is available to all members at no charge.

Consultation and Support – Many board members and administrators find the routine consultation with KASB staff members one of the most important services provided by the association. Members are encouraged to contact staff via phone or email.

The KASB staff includes professionals with extensive backgrounds in school administration, policy development, communications/public relations/marketing, leadership development… virtually every phase of school district operations!

Information and News – Publications include “Daily News Briefs,” “School Board Review,” “Clerk News,” and periodic special reports and issue papers. General association news is shared through email alerts. The KASB website provides members with general information, forms, copies of testimony and other relevant information.

Governance and KASB Policy – Each member board has one vote in the Delegate Assembly. This body meets at least once a year at the KASB Delegate Assembly to decide official KASB policies on legislative matters and to elect the president-elect designee.

Other opportunities exist to participate in the governance and work of the association. These include short-term appointments to ad hoc committees and longer-term commitments to standing committees and governing boards.

Special and Customized Service – KASB charges a separate fee for services members use selectively, such as legal, policy and negotiations services, the annual convention, seminars, workshops and special interest publications and training materials.

KASB provides a broad spectrum of educational programming and professional development training to school districts. Our staff has the skills and knowledge to present information to district personnel for both personal development and career advancement in a variety of formats and venues. Training is customized to meet local time-frames and needs.

Whether it’s mentoring, supervision or technical assistance for administrators or classified staff, KASB can provide what your district needs.

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