State Board of education says ‘specialized certificate’ plan needs more work

A proposal to allow the state’s innovative districts to hire non-licensed people to teach was sent back for more work on Thursday after numerous educators spoke against the plan.

KASB expressed support for the proposal, based on positions calling for more local flexibility and strengthening the innovative districts law.

However, even before a number of teachers, higher education officials and school advocates voiced disapproval of the measure to the Kansas State Board of Education, the board put off a vote on the proposal indefinitely.

Board Chair Jim McNiece said he wants the leaders of innovative school districts to meet with the deans of colleges of teacher education to work on their concerns. He set no deadline to re-do the plan.

Later, innovative district leaders conceded that they should have engaged more stakeholders before bringing the proposal to the state board.

McNiece said the pushback from educators was good to hear and that inviting more stakeholders to the conversation will produce a better proposal. He added there is no hurry to put together a new plan.

As presented to the board, the measure would have allowed the six innovative districts to hire non-licensed professional employees or licensed professional employees in areas outside their area of licensure. The “specialized certificate” would have been good for one year and renewable.

During the public comments portion of the meeting, numerous people spoke against the plan.

Several said a person may have deep knowledge of a certain subject, such as math, but without training, he or she wouldn’t have the necessary skills to teach, especially to students who have special needs.

Other speakers said the proposal degraded the license teachers are required to have to teach and compared the proposal to allowing a person to perform surgery without a medical degree.

Officials from innovative districts said allowing this alternative hiring plan would give them flexibility to address teacher shortages and staff hard-to-fill subject areas.

In response to some of the comments from educators, Kansas City USD 500 Superintendent Cindy Lane said there was no way her district would use the proposal to hire someone who wasn’t the best qualified for the job.

KASB supported the proposal, saying it would allow local officials to determine the best way to provide education in their communities.

Several members of the board said they did not want a system that allowed alternative licensing of elementary school teachers. Teaching children how to read and write and beginning math was too important and requires special training, they said.

State tax revenue revised downward by $276 million

State officials on Monday decreased tax revenue estimates again, a move that could have ramifications for school funding, which makes up just over half of the state budget.

Gov. Sam Brownback’s budget director, Shawn Sullivan, said in talking with legislators, most say they want to leave K-12 funding alone.

But Sullivan noted the falling state revenue picture will make balancing the budget more challenging as legislators prepare for the wrap up session starting April 29. And he said recent local school bond approvals will increase costs to the state.

Tax revenue for the remainder of the current fiscal year and the next two fiscal years was revised downward by $276 million since the last revenue estimate was made in November 2014. That includes $87.5 million in the current fiscal year, $99.6 million in the next one which starts July 1, and $88.4 million in the one after that.

Because of other budget adjustments, Sullivan said the state has to come up with $400 million in taxes, cuts or a combination to balance the budget for the next fiscal year, which starts July 1.

Brownback has proposed tobacco and liquor tax increases and slowing down future state income tax cuts to produce a package worth about $210 million, Sullivan said. If legislators were to pass that plan — and that’s a big if because...
Stand Up, Step Up and Speak Up for Public Education!
KASB President Rod Stewart

The April election is behind us, and it is time for our newly-elected board members to begin their journey. It is also time for us as the current board to make sure we do all we can for a smooth transition in July. A lot of that depends on what we do in the next two and a half months to help our new board colleagues prepare for their responsibilities.

The workshops for new board members sponsored by KASB begin the end of the month. There are seven dates and locations to choose from. The best way to participate is to make sure at least one veteran board member and the superintendent attend the workshop with the new board members.

It is a great opportunity to spend focused and uninterrupted time with your new colleagues, building relationships and leadership capacity. KASB staff will present updated materials, best practices and insights that serve as a great refresher course for the veterans.

That was the message shared with us by NSBA President John Tuttle during the national conference in March. I am very proud to say Kansas school board members have already been answering this call! We have been present and active in Topeka this Legislative Session, and I can tell you it has made a difference. But our work is not done. When the Legislature returns for their veto session, there are a number of issues we expect to be big topics of conversation.

Among these is the push to change when school board and other local elections are held. More than two-thirds of the school boards in Kansas have passed resolutions opposing this change, yet the issue continues to be discussed in the Legislature. I’m asking every boards member to individually “stand up and speak up” against this change. The stated purpose for changing is to increase voter turnout. I believe there are better ways to do that than destroy the current system.

Changes to the Professional Negotiations Act is another area of concern. KASB, along with KNEA, USA Kansas and KSSA, agreed on several recommendations to improve the current process. There has been a lot of debate and discussion in the Legislature, but no final action on a bill that includes our recommendations. KASB will continue to monitor this issue and alert us on the status of this issue.

This is a busy and exciting time of year for everyone involved in public education. As board members we will go to recognition banquets and ceremonies, participate in graduation, attend concerts and programs. At the same time we’ll be working on budgets and making decisions to get ready for next school year. Along with all of that many of us will be planning for July 1 when our new board members take office.

Selected highlights:
- A voucher amendment was withdrawn, but is expected to be discussed during the Senate’s floor debate on the bill. (Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C.)
- Grants to states to improve the quality and reliability of state assessments. (Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc.)
- An amendment to improve data collection methods and systems, intended to reduce the burden on school districts. (Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo.)
- A change of the funding formula ratio, to 80 percent poverty, 20 percent population, regarding funding for high-quality teachers, principals and other school leaders. (Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C.)
- Related to the Burr amendment, a “hold harmless” provision for states that would lose funding due to the change in the funding formula. (Sen. Bob Casey, D-Penn.)
- Related to the Casey amendment, a gradual decrease of “hold harmless” funding, phasing out the provision in seven years. (Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C.)

While the Senate HELP Committee action is another big step in the legislative process, Senators must agree to move ECAA to the Senate floor for an up-or-down vote.

Also still on the horizon is the House version (H.R. 5) which has been debated on the House Floor, with no final votes yet taken.

Brad Neuenswander, Kansas interim commissioner of education, said the state education department supports the reauthorization efforts by Sen. Alexander. He said he hoped Congress would approve a bill and President Barack Obama would sign it into law.

“We don’t want to fall back on No Child Left Behind,” he said.

U.S. Senate advances No Child Left Behind replacement

The U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee has unanimously recommended legislation to modernize and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) after considering more than 50 amendments, with 29 adopted, eight defeated, and 20 withdrawn.

The proposal would replace the No Child Left Behind Act. Currently, Kansas and many other states are operating under U.S. Department of Education waivers from many provisions of NCLB.

Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) encouraged a ‘yes’ vote on the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), due to its bipartisan approach and “because the process was fair,” stating that “if you like the fact that we have the Department of Education running schools through waivers in 42 states, vote no.” Moments later, the Committee’s final vote was 22 to 0.

“Today marks a great victory for local and community leadership in public education,” said Thomas J. Gentzel, executive director, National School Boards Association.
Participants are chosen through an application process on the basis of individual leadership in public education and participation in activities that promote effective governance and raise student achievement.

“KASB’s Leadership for Tomorrow is about gaining perspective and learning from others,” said KASB Executive Director John Heim. “This year’s class includes board members, district and building-level administrators from all over Kansas, each already a leader in his or her own community. This program will give them the opportunity to experience the unique challenges and opportunities in schools all across the state, large and small, rural, suburban and urban.”

The Leadership for Tomorrow class will explore a broad spectrum of issues and concerns related to public education and student achievement, government officials, educators and experts from a variety of fields.

This is the eleventh year for the program at KASB.

Blue Valley USD 229 has just been named a top 10 Digital School District by the Center for Digital Education (CDE) and National School Boards Association (NSBA). Blue Valley was ranked eighth in the large school district category.

The Digital School Districts survey, presented by CDE and NSBA, and underwritten by Sprint, this year recognized school districts in three different enrollment categories that expand their use of technology not only in the classroom but district-wide as well, such as with their school boards.

Those districts in the top 10 best represent an ability to implement ever-evolving technological advances in digital education.

Blue Valley has been recognized seven out of the last 10 years.


KASB announces Leadership for Tomorrow Class of 2015-2016

- Bill Mullins, Superintendent of Schools, Liberal USD 480
- Stuart Moeckel, Assistant Superintendent, Goddard Public Schools USD 265
- Ron Langston, Board of Education, Jeff Co North USD 339
- Leah Filter, Board of Education, Manhattan USD 383
- Rod Garman, Assistant Superintendent, Topeka Seaman USD 345
- Jeff Hersh, Assistant Superintendent, Goddard Public Schools USD 265
- Ron Langston, Board of Education, Jeff Co North USD 339
- Paul Larkin, Superintendent of Schools, Liberal USD 480
- Steve Lilly, Superintendent of Schools, McLouth USD 342
- Matt Meek, Assistant Superintendent, Paola USD 368
- Stuart Moeckel, Building Principal, Victoria USD 432
- Bill Mullins, Superintendent of Schools, Marysville USD 364
- Gregg Noel, Board of Education, Abilene USD 435
- Lym Rantz, Superintendent of Schools, Tonganoxie USD 464
- Ty Rhodes, Building Principal, Hesston USD 460
- Jeff Rollins, Board of Education, Satanta USD 507
- Larry Roth, Assistant Superintendent, Wellington USD 353
- LaCee Sell, Superintendent of Schools, Chapman USD 473
- Jayson Strickland, Assistant Superintendent, Kansas City Kansas USD 500
- Phil Wilson, Building Principal, Washington County USD 108
- Superintendent of Schools Norton USD 211 as of July 1, 2015)
- Rhonda Wince, Board of Education, McPherson USD 418
- John Wyrick, Superintendent of Schools, Labette County USD 506

Blue Valley receives national recognition

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...Revenue estimates continued from page 1

the proposal has gotten no traction so far — they would still have to come up with a $190 million more in tax increases, cuts or both.

Sullivan said Brownback will release a budget amendment later this week that will reduce spending by approximately $80 million, with about half of that amount coming from reduced Medicaid caseloads.

The dire financial news rekindled debate over Brownback’s income tax cuts from 2012 and 2013. Brownback said the cuts would boost the economy.

Since then, revenue declines that are deeper than estimates have been the norm. State bonds have been downgraded by Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s Investor Service, and transfers from the state highway fund have increased.

“The Brownback tax plan is a failure and is endangering the future of the state of Kansas,” said House Minority Leader Tom Burroughs, D-Kansas City. “We must commit to generating a dependable revenue stream that is able to provide the resources necessary to reinvest in Kansas communities and grow a successful economy over the long-term.”

But Sullivan defended the income tax cuts, saying Kansas was enjoying low unemployment.

The revised numbers were produced by the Consensus Revenue Estimating Group, which is made up of legislative researchers, Brownback’s budget staff, Kansas Department of Revenue officials and university economists.

The estimating group said the Kansas economy and state personal income were lagging the nation.
Workshops

April, May & June 2015
Seven Locations Across Kansas!

April 28 Manhattan
April 29 Oakley
April 30 Sublette
May 6 Clearwater
May 7 Girard/Greenbush
May 30 Hays
June 20 KASB Topeka