K-12 Commission to begin drafting proposals

The K-12 Performance and Efficiency Commission directed its staff to begin drafting legislative recommendations that could lead to budget compliance standards for school districts. Commission Chair Sam Williams has also agreed to present an update on the commission’s work on Oct. 22 at the KASB School Finance Seminar on School Performance and Efficiency.

The commission heard presentations from 12 school superintendents from districts spending above and below the median in six enrollment groups. KASB has posted these statements on its website at www.kasb.org/K12PECTestimony. The president of the Kansas Parent and Teacher Association also testified. Several key issues emerged from Wednesday’s meeting, which included presentations by Bert Moore, West Elk USD 282; Michael Hull, Sedgwick USD 439; JK Campbell, Winfield USD 465; Doug Powers, Maize USD 266; David Howard, Basehor-Linwood USD 458; Dr. Marlin Berry, Olathe USD 233; Alan Cunningham, Dodge City USD 443; Jeff Travis, Beloit USD 273; and Tim Conrad, Piper USD 203.

Local Control vs State Funding.

Every superintendent stressed the importance of allowing school districts to make financial decisions based on community interests and values in the spirit of “local control.” Many argued the diversity of the state means there cannot be a “one size fits all” approach to budgeting. However, at least several members of the commission argued that since the state of Kansas provides the bulk of school funding, the state had the right to require some process or standards for efficient use of those funds. What that process would be or how those standards would be implemented has not been explained.

It’s Not About Cutting Spending.

Both Commission Chair Sam Williams and Dave Trabert, president of the Kansas Policy Institute, said the goal of the commission is not to find ways to reduce school spending but rather to redirect funding to areas that would improve student performance or outcomes. Mr. Trabert also suggested the state could limit funding for districts based on efficiency standards, but allow districts to spend more in various budget areas if they wished with local funds. How this would differ from the current concept of a state budget per pupil and general fund provided by the state, supplemented by a local option budget, has not been presented.

Spending Differences Explained.

The commission received little information to suggest “efficiency” makes a difference in total operating costs. On the contrary, all of the

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Prohibition on political activities at school and on school equipment reviewed

Most Kansas school boards have adopted policies prohibiting the use of school time, school property or school equipment by employees for the purpose of furthering the interests of any political party, the campaign of any political candidate or the advocacy of any political issue. (See KASB Policies GBRK and GCRK). However, there is also a Kansas statute (K.S.A. 25-4169a) that prohibits these activities by municipal workers, which include school employees.

These board policies and this statute should be brought to the attention of staff and the expectations of the use of school time, property and equipment should be explained. Administrators and supervisors should also be sure any violations of such policies are addressed immediately and any consequences be applied consistently regardless of the type of political speech.

Any further questions can be directed to the KASB legal staff.
Increased inquiries about student data? Need staff training or just information?

KASB legal staff have received numerous questions from school districts regarding access to student data. Many of the questions stem from the state legislature’s 2014 Kansas Student Data Privacy Act and how the new state law relates to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Questions include what data is protected under state and federal law, who has access to student records, when student records may be accessed/released, and what legal requirements exist for school districts. Access to other forms of digital data has also become a frequent legal topic KASB attorneys are asked to address. Because of the frequency of questions, KASB recommends each district review its policies and procedures to ensure compliance with all state and federal laws.

Report outlines impact of cuts to K-12 education funding

State funding cuts are making it harder for Kansas public schools to provide children with a high-quality education, according to a report released in early September by the Kansas Center for Economic Growth. KCEG analyzed data from the Kansas State Department of Education and surveyed school districts in Kansas to examine how funding cuts are affecting educational outcomes and programs. Read more at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0903a.aspx

State Assessment Advisory Council receives update

The Kansas College and Career Ready Assessment Advisory Council (KCCRAAC) met September 3. The meeting was attended by many educational leaders from around the state to provide insights and ideas about the Kansas College and Career Standards.

Interim Commissioner Brad Neuenswander shared information about the changes in U.S. Department of Education’s approval of the Kansas waiver and the alignment of our system with federal expectations. Read more at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0904b.aspx

Olathe board member appointed to Kansas Children’s Cabinet

LeEtta Felter, president of the Olathe USD 233 board of education, has been appointed to a four-year term on the Kansas Children’s Cabinet. Read more at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0909a.aspx

Interim committees, membership named

The members of the interim Joint Pensions, Investments and Benefits Committee and other interims have been named. Read more at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0903b.aspx

KASB’s Legal Staff can provide onsite training to member districts on how to handle inquiries about student records, including access, procedures to release student data, and the relationship between FERPA and the Student Data Privacy Act.

Please contact Donna Whiteman, KASB assistant executive director/legal services, at dwhiteman@kasb.org or 800-432-2471 to arrange for a KASB attorney to present a one or two hour student records training for staff.

If you have questions about who has access to student data and records or how to handle a request, please contact one of KASB’s attorneys at 800-432-2471.

2014 ACT results show improvement in college-readiness

ACT released its annual “Condition of College and Career Readiness” report last week, providing information on average scores and percent meeting benchmarks for college and career readiness in Reading, Mathematics, English, Science, and across all four measures. For Kansas, the percentage of students meeting all college ready benchmarks increased for the third straight year.

The following table shows the percent of Kansas students meeting all four benchmarks as compared to the national percent. Starting in 2006, Kansas students performed notably above the national average. Read more at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0829b.aspx
“high spending” districts either host a special education cooperative (which means their budgets are inflated by paying for teachers serving students in other districts) or have much higher numbers of low income, bilingual and special education students (which generates more state and federal funding to provide special services), or both. The “low spending” districts all had lower percentages of special needs students or were at the high end of the enrollment category with economies of scale.

Has your board reviewed Governor Brownback’s School Efficiency Task Force Report or had an efficiency audit?

That was the Chairman’s question of every superintendent, and one local boards are likely to get from legislators in the future. Be prepared to answer. It’s important to note the Governor’s Task Force had very few recommendations that would apply to local districts and many were simply proposals for additional study. However, school boards should review the possible implications of these proposals. Find the report online at www.kasb.org/school efficiency.

Thursday afternoon, Chairman Williams offered four ideas for staff to develop into specific proposals for the commission’s next meeting on September 18-19. He said the goal is to force the Legislature to have serious debate on these topics. Here are the proposals to be developed for consideration. Remember, these are conceptual proposals - none have been approved by the commission.

Require the Legislature to vote on previous efficiency study recommendations. One of the commission’s charges is to review the recommendations of Governor Brownback’s School Efficiency Task Force, released in January of 2013. Many of those proposals were not adopted or even introduced as bills. In fact, many of the recommendations simply called for additional study by the Legislature.

It is hard to see how the commission can “require” the Legislature to vote on anything. However, the commission has been authorized to draft legislation to be introduced in both the House and Senate. The commission could approve putting the Governor’s task force proposals into specific legislative language. Alternatively, it could simply urge the Legislature to take another look at the ideas.

Expand Legislative Post Audit’s school efficiency audit program and establish “compliance standards” for operations. The first part is relatively simple: LPA is currently directed by statute to conduct three school efficiency audits per year; one each on small, medium-sized and large districts. Districts are first selected from volunteers, but if none step forward in any size group, LPA makes a selection by random drawing. Expanding the number of audits would either require increased agency staff or reduce the LPA’s capacity to conduct other audits of state programs.

The second part of the proposal is much less defined. Chairman Williams explained to KASB that he envisioned a process by which educational experts would define best practice standards for district business operations. These standards would be used by LPA in conducting its audits. LPA Director Scott Frank stressed to the commission he believes other experts - not LPA staff - should develop such standards.

The critical issue is whether such requirements would be developed as recommendations for districts or whether LPA could require compliance for districts it audits - and by implication, all school districts. The proposal does not specify who would be selected to develop these standards, what the standards would cover, or whether a public agency, such as the Legislature or Kansas State Board of Education would be required to vote on them.

Proposed recommendations of KASB and other organizations.

KASB offered 10 proposals for enhancing the role of local boards improving efficiency, based on policies adopted by KASB members. Chairman Williams wanted all of these proposals presented for consideration by the Legislature. However, a core position stressed by KASB is opposition to specific state mandates for district financial operations. The chair also requested that recommendations from other organizations, such as the United School Administrators, be drafted for consideration.

Establish a process to define the Rose capacities. KASB and a number of other conferees stressed that school district efficiency cannot be evaluated without defining the school system’s outcomes. The 2014 Legislature approved seven goals for K-12 education, using the Rose capacities adopted by the Kansas Supreme Court for determining the adequacy of educational funding. KASB and many conferees said the new goals are consistent with the State Board’s goals and definition for college and career readiness, but are much broader than state reading and mathematics assessments and graduation rates used under No Child Left Behind.

Chairman Williams suggested the commission should endorse a process to define how these seven capacities should be measured. That issue was the focus of a special conference KASB hosted last month. Find information on the Rose Standards and Conference online at www.kasb.org/RoseStandards.
KASB Fall Education Summits

Six dates and locations to choose from

- September 30 - Greenbush
- October 1 - Clearwater
- October 2 - Garden City
- October 7 - Oakley
- October 8 - Junction City
- October 9 - Shawnee Mission

$150 per person OR $450 for teams of four or more

About the Summits

Are the Schools of the Present the Schools of the Future?

What's happening now in Kansas will change how we educate our children. The outcome of the 2014 General Election, the next Legislative Session - even recommendations from groups such as the K-12 Student Performance and Efficiency Commission - all have the potential to influence policies, regulations and school funding.

The courts and politicians have had their say. The Kansas Supreme Court, State Legislature, Governor and Kansas State Board of Education have all agreed the Rose Standards are the appropriate measure to use when determining adequate funding for Kansas public schools. This is now a part of our state's constitutional test when deciding if the Legislature has made "suitable provisions for finance of the educational interests of the state."

Locally elected boards of education, professional educators and communities should guide the future of public schools in Kansas, but they must become part of the conversation. How should we prepare our students for success after high school graduation? How will we measure progress and hold ourselves accountable for meeting the Rose Standards? What state policies need changed or added? What resources do we need, both now and in the future?

Kansas public schools and their communities have new opportunities for collaboration, change and innovation, leading our students and our state to greater heights of achievement and future success. Become part of the discussions and join education and community leaders at one of the six KASB 2014 Fall Education Summits.