Where will you be August 5?
by KASB President Rod Stewart

In just over one week, Kansans will have the opportunity to substantially shape the future of our state for several years to come. If this seems like an overstatement, think about the policies and laws passed in the last few years by both our elected Kansas State Board of Education and our Kansas legislators. Their actions have a direct impact on our local communities and our local public schools.

The primary election August 5 has a number of key races, both for State Board and for the state Legislature.

Election season has always been marked by an increase in mail, phone calls and advertising. You add in social media, and it becomes even more tempting to just tune it all out. KASB created an election tracker (www.kasb.org) to provide information that can help clarify who is running for what seat.

But it is important to listen to what candidates are saying (or not saying!) during this election cycle, and it is even more important to do your own research and find out if they are “walking their talk.” Find out if their voting records and actions align with the direction you believe we must head.

The reality is that many races are already decided or will be decided on August 5. If candidates are running with no general election opponent, their election to the office is essentially decided. If two candidates from the same party are the only candidates, then whoever wins on August 5 has won the election. Independent candidates have until noon on August 4 to file, but this kind of challenger is almost never successful.

Whatever your political affiliation, whether or not you are happy or troubled by the direction our state is going, your vote matters. And it matters that you model the importance of voting and going to the polls on Election Day for your children, grandchildren, friends and colleagues.

Follow Rod on Twitter at farmall1902.

At-risk funding draws questions at first Efficiency Commission meeting

At-risk weighting, which provides over $400 million to support low achieving students, drew the most attention at the organizational meeting of the K-12 Performance and Efficiency Commission on July 18. The commission elected retired Wichita business executive Sam Williams as chair and Shawnee Mission USD 512 Superintendent Jim Hinson as vice chair. The following are the highlights of the first meeting.

Skepticism about at-risk

At least three of the nine voting commissioners - Mike O’Neal, president and CEO of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dave Trabert, president of the Kansas Policy Institute, and former Senate Vice President John Vratil - raised questions about the current at-risk funding system in the school finance act. Each district receives at-risk funding based on the number of free lunch eligible students enrolled. That amount of funding must then be used to provide services to students who meet at-risk criteria, regardless of whether the students are eligible.
Are there changes to safety regulations on the horizon?

The Emergency Safety Interventions (ESI) regulations limiting the ability of schools to retrain or place students in seclusion were again a hot topic of discussion at the Kansas State Board of Education meeting on July 8, 2014. The State Board appears ready to exempt law enforcement officers from regulations, but a more controversial debate over appealing disputes to the Kansas State Department of Education is expected later this year.

As part of an update regarding the implementation of the regulations, the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) recommended a change in the ESI regulations to exempt law enforcement officers. The exemption would include all school resource officers employed by a city or county police department, as well as campus police officers employed pursuant to K.S.A. 72-8222. School district security officers would not be exempt from the ESI regulations because they are not trained and certified as law enforcement officers.

No action was taken on SEAC’s recommendation on July 8. The board could take action on this proposal at its August meeting. There does not appear to be opposition to this proposal. KASB staff believe the exemption for law enforcement officers will be a positive change to the ESI regulations. Contact your State Board member to let them know if you support this change.

Also at the July 8 meeting, Kansas State Department of Education staff discussed the reporting procedures and compliance rates. By the fourth quarter of the 2013-14 school year, 98 percent of school buildings were compliant with the reporting requirements. Of the 25 buildings that did not report, eight were private schools and 17 were public schools. Two specialty schools were not in compliance with the ESI rules during this past school year, but they are now fully implementing the regulations.

KSDE staff are working on developing an ESI process manual to assist with the implementation of the regulations.

There was extensive discussion at the July 8 meeting regarding the dispute resolution appeal or complaint process. The Disability Rights Center (DRC) addressed the State Board in public comments and indicated they had collaborated with KSDE’s former general counsel to create a complaint process for ESI complaints. While this process would require parents to first try to resolve the issues at the local level, parents would be able to file a complaint that would be investigated by KSDE if the matter was not resolved to the parents’ satisfaction.

KSDE staff acknowledged that the former general counsel had worked on a proposal with DRC, but stated that KSDE staff had created a different proposal for SEAC to consider as another option. No specifics were given regarding this other option for SEAC. KSDE staff indicated these options were going to be discussed at the July 23 SEAC meeting.

KASB will send a staff member to cover the SEAC meeting and will keep our members posted on the outcome.

Innovative districts board sets plan for approving new members

Members of a board created to review and coordinate school districts seeking to boost student achievement in non-traditional ways approved by-laws and a schedule for considering applicants at a meeting in Salina. It is the next step in implementing a law passed in 2013 that allows a limited number of districts to apply for innovative status.

Full article at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0718a.aspx

Candidate endorsements provided

With the Kansas Primary Election coming up on Tuesday, August 5, it is important to know who is running for office and where they stand on the issues that matter to you. KASB has compiled a list of candidate endorsements from Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), Kansas Families for Education (KFE), Game On, Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) and Johnson County Educators Political Action Community (JCPAC). The list includes the office the candidate is seeking and their contact information. You can access the 2014 Candidate Endorsements spreadsheet on the KASB website on the main page under News and Notes.

New E-Rate money coming for FY 16, 17?

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted 3-2 on July 11 to approve an order that would boost Wi-Fi funding for schools and libraries by $1 billion a year over the next two years and set an annual “funding target” for that amount for years after that. However, news is emerging from Washington, D.C. this week that an appropriation bill being considered in the House might try to circumvent the FCC decision.

Full article at: www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0716a.aspx
for free meals. Three charges were raised:

• First, the increase in the percent of students eligible for free lunch from 32.2 percent in 2000-01 to 49.6 percent in 2012-13 was at least partly due to the “incentive” of a higher at-risk weighting factor, rather than an actual increase in low income students - suggesting that either parents or districts are basically “cheating” by adding students who do not really qualify. Following the Montoy school finance decision and Legislative Post Audit cost study in 2006, the Legislature raised the at-risk weighting factor from 10 percent in 2005 to 19.3 percent in 2006, 27.8 percent in 2007, 37.8 percent in 2008, and 45.6 percent in 2009.

• Second, the significant increase in at-risk funding, from less than $100 million in the early 2000s to over $400 million now, has not made much difference in student performance, suggesting these funds have not been used effectively. The Kansas State Department of Education presented data from state reading and math tests showing low income and minority students actually made greater gains than higher income and white students during the past decade, although they fell back over the past two years. Low income and minority students also made greater gains in the “on time” graduation rate.

• Third, the at-risk funding should be shifted away from using free lunch numbers to an academic measure, such as the number of students scoring below standards on state assessments. Such legislation has been proposed in several recent sessions. Basically, such a change would shift millions of dollars away from districts with a high percentage of low income students, to either be redistributed to other districts or simply to reduce funding.

KASB addressed many of these issues in a special report on At-Risk Funding and All Day Kindergarten during the 2014 Legislative Session.

Flashback to Efficiency Study

In 2012, Governor Sam Brownback appointed a task force to make recommendations for changes that would “get more money in the classroom and less in administration and overhead costs.” It was chaired by State Board member Ken Willard, R-Hutchinson, who reviewed the group’s 12 recommendations released in January, 2013, with the commission. Only a few of the recommendations have been implemented; many of the proposals were not specific plans, but call for further study. Some of these unresolved issues could be taken up by the commission. Find the full report at www.kasb.org►Advocacy►News Briefs►School Efficiency.

Lessons from Post Audits

Scott Frank, head of the Legislative Division of Post Audit, reviewed that agency’s work on school district efficiency audits since 2009. It included an oversstudy of school districts spending patterns which provide “benchmarks” for per pupil amounts in instructional, support, administration, transportation and food services areas. LPA conducted seven district audits before a special school audit team was disbanded due to budget cuts in 2010. Beginning in 2013, LPA has been charged with conducting performance audits in three districts each year (small, medium and large).

Mr. Frank indicated the school district audit process now generally divides recommendations into those with minimal impact on students and the community; those with moderate impact; and those with significant impact. Generally, those with the least impact on students and community save the least amount of money. Among the most common suggestions are reducing costs in food service, making changes in high school and middle school class schedules to reduce the required number of teachers, and closing facilities to reduce excess capacity.

For more information on LPA’s school efficiency audits, search “K-12 education” under audit reports on the LPA webpage.

Rose standards expectations

One of the key questions emerging from commission members, first voiced by former Senate Assistant Minority Leader Janis Lee, was this: the commission’s title includes both performance and efficiency - will it look at both? If so, how will performance be measured?

Commission staff provided information on the new “Rose” standards or student capacities adopted by the Kansas Supreme Court in the Gannon case this March and endorsed by the Legislature as state education goals in the same bill that created the commission (HB 2506).

Several commission members noted that, although state test scores and graduation rates had increased, the Kansas Board of Regents has expressed concerns about the high levels of remedial or developmental courses taken by Kansas students. Since the “Rose” standards address the need for “college and career readiness,” Mr. O’Neal asked Interim Commissioner Brad Neuenwander what a high school diploma means in light of the Rose standards.

The commissioner said that was why the State Board has been moving to new “college and career ready” standards and new assessments that will have a higher “passing” threshold than before. He noted for previous generations, passing eighth grade was considered a major benchmark, and only a minority of students completed high school. “We still celebrate eighth grade promotion in many schools,” he said, “but not as an ending. Everyone is expected to go on to high school. We need to change the view of high school graduation from an ending point to being viewed as just an important step to further postsecondary education or moving successfully into a career.”
Legislative Committee reviews impact of new standards on school achievement, programs and funding

The KASB Legislative Committee spent its first meeting of 2014 reviewing the potential impact of the new educational goals or “Rose” capacities adopted by the Kansas Supreme Court, Legislature and Governor. This meeting was the first step in developing recommendations for KASB’s advocacy positions.

The purpose of the committee is to develop recommendations for changes in KASB’s priority resolution “First in Education, the Kansas Way,” as adopted last year, changes in any of KASB’s permanent policies, or any new one-year resolutions. Any new positions or changes must be adopted by the KASB Delegate Assembly.

The committee received a report on feedback from KASB’s 23 advocacy tour meetings held in May and June, an update on the state budget and school finance and the new state Commission on K-12 Performance and Efficiency, and a legal review of teacher due process changes.

School board members and district leaders with recommendations for KASB action may contact members of the committee or KASB advocacy staff, John Heim, Mark Tallman or Tom Krebs, through the KASB office or website.

Each KASB region is represented on the committee, with members appointed by the KASB President. The committee is chaired by the immediate past president of KASB. Find committee member email addresses online at www.kasb.org/wcm/_NB/14/NB0714.aspx

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