Watson takes over as school commissioner
by KASB Communications Specialist Scott Rothschild

Randy Watson took over as Kansas education commissioner when the fate of public schools in the state is at the center of a blistering political fight over funding.

Watson, who brings more than 30 years of experience in Kansas education, said he hopes he can help the various sides move closer together or at least talk with one another.

“We are not really talking with each other; we are talking at each other,” Watson said. What is needed, he says, is “deep collaboration.”

Ironically, what appears lacking on the Kansas political scene — communication and cooperation — is what was repeatedly emphasized on Watson’s statewide listening tour as what Kansans want their students to attain.

Watson and the Kansas State Board of Education launched the listening tour earlier this year after Watson’s selection as commissioner was announced.

During those 20 public forums and eight meetings with local chambers of commerce, parents, teachers, business representatives and others said they wanted students to graduate who were honest, dependable, team players and persistent.

“There are a host of other skills that Kansans say we need to be teaching,” Watson said.

“That didn’t surprise me, but what did surprise me was the intensity,” of that belief, he said.

Although Watson’s official start day was July 1, he has been working as commissioner-select since the State Board picked him in November to succeed Diane DeBacker, who resigned last year to serve as a senior education advisor in Abu Dhabi.

Prior to his selection, Watson had been superintendent of McPherson USD 418 for 10 years and previously served as a teacher, assistant principal and principal.

Kansas State Board of Education Chairman Jim McNiece said the board thinks Watson and Brad Neuenswander, who served as acting commissioner and will remain at the Kansas State Department of Education, will make a great team.

Of Watson, McNiece said, “He brings a vast knowledge of Kansas educational history and brings a lot of success from McPherson.”

“He has a lot of connections in terms of knowing people around the state, the Legislature, the agencies, and so on. He doesn’t have to spend a year to get to know people.”

Under Watson’s leadership, McPherson was one of the first school districts awarded innovative status, which provides exemptions from many state laws and rules for a district pledge to improve student achievement.

...continued on page 2

Shimkus begins term as President
by KASB Assistant Executive Director Carol Pitts

Don Shimkus, Oxford USD 358 board of education, began his term as president of the Kansas Association of School Boards July 1. Shimkus was elected by the Association’s Delegate Assembly December 8, 2013, in Wichita. Since that time, he has served as president-elect designee and then president-elect of KASB.

KASB is a not-for-profit organization located in Topeka, Kansas and dedicated to serving members of governing boards for unified school districts, community colleges, area vocational-technical schools and cooperatives, interlocals and regional service centers. The association serves a membership base of close to 5,000 school board members and educational leaders.

The association is governed by a board of directors representing 15 regions in Kansas. The elected officers of the association include the President, Don Shimkus; Immediate Past President, Rod Stewart (Washington Co. USD 108 board of education member); and Amy Martin, President-Elect (Olathe USD 233 board of education member).
President’s Message
by Don Shimkus, KASB President

Greetings!
I’m excited by the opportunity to lead KASB this year. To get started, I’d like to share some of my beliefs:

• Public education is essential to a free society
• It is a moral imperative that we provide every Kansas child with the tools to succeed
• This is not a zero-sum game - one district’s gain need not be another’s loss

Furthermore:
• There is a concerted effort to discredit and dismantle public education - this effort is well-organized and well-funded
• “We grow accustomed to the dark, when light is put away.” - Emily Dickinson
• We cannot accept this as “the new normal” - It’s time to take back our schools from those who seek to cripple or eliminate them

What can we do? Talk about it! To everyone. All.The.Time. I love baseball, but instead of “How ‘bout them Royals”, our water-cooler (or social media) talk should be “Did you hear about the great things going on at the school”? Or, “Do you think we provide our schools enough support”? At the diner, coffeehouse or co-op we should discuss the weather less and our schools more. Ask others, “What do you think about our schools”? Make public schools the talk of the town!

I continually hear from legislators that they aren’t hearing anything from their constituents. It’s time to change that, too. Silence is tacit approval. Stand Up, Step Up and Speak Up!

Some further beliefs:
• The power of one - YOU can make a difference
• Strength in numbers - WE are more effective working together
• To that end - We must focus on our similarities rather than our differences

Thank you for all you do for our kids. Let’s get talking!

Unlimited Access to 20 Trainings and Seminars in 2015-16!

Close to one-third of our members used at least seven - and many used more - “seats” at seminars and workshops last year. We often hear our members would send more people, but cost is a factor. The all-new KASB Season Pass is a great solution! Typical registration for a full day seminar is $150. A one-time purchase of $1,200 gives your district or member organization unlimited access to 20 trainings!

Watson, continued from page 1

The actions of innovative districts have sometimes been at odds with the Kansas National Education Association, such as the push for a waiver for teacher licensure.

But Marcus Baltzell, a spokesman for the KNEA, said the association was looking forward to working with Watson.

“We are excited about working with him and hoping for a good collaborative dialogue,” Baltzell said.

Watson said he believes one of his biggest challenges is changing the atmosphere of political discourse about public school education so public schools are valued and those who work to educate Kansas students are appreciated.

He said his other big challenge is being part of the solution to fixing the state’s revenue problems.

He said the Legislature and Gov. Sam Brownback “deserve a ton of credit” for shoring up the state pension plan for teachers, but he said everyone must understand the money going to the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System can’t be used for classroom improvements.

“I understand what every district is going through. We are going to have to put money in the classroom,” Watson said.

Find more about the KSDE and KSBE online at www.ksde.org.

KASB’s New Season Pass
Entitles You to Unlimited Registrations!
KASB now offers unlimited registration to quality training through the KASB Season Pass.

• No need to worry about cost for the rest of the fiscal year.
• No more individual registration charges.
• No limitations on how many can participate.

Contact KASB for details at 800.432.2471
It’s your circus, they’re your monkeys
by KASB Executive Director Dr. John Heim

My wife started a new job last week. Superintendent of Schools. Her first day in town and with nothing in the cupboard, she headed to the local grocery store early in the morning. Incognito in ball cap and sunglasses at 7:00 a.m. surely she could slip in and out quickly. Experienced superintendents and board members know the inherent dangers of the grocery store and would never have attempted such a move, but she is new and a risk-taker. You know how this ends... “Say, aren’t you the new superintendent? There are a few things I would like to talk with you about....”

There are 58 new superintendents in Kansas this year. Over half, 35, are brand new to the job, never having served as superintendents before. These superintendents have all passed their preparation classes and taken their certification exams. They have all honed their skills as principals and/or central office administrators. They are smart men and women with good skills and a heart to make things better for kids. But they have never sat in the superintendent’s chair.

The part that is hard to learn from books is the personal side:

1. You are always the superintendent. Once you put on the hat, it doesn’t come off. (Even if it’s a ball cap that you think makes you invisible in the grocery store at 7:00 a.m.) My dad, who has over 20 years of experience in the superintendent’s chair, used to say “imagine someone is following you around with a video camera.” Today, when everyone has a smartphone, you can be assured that someone is.

2. Your family will be affected. Your spouse and children will be treated differently. People with good intentions will give them special treatment, which can be even worse than treating them poorly because of a grudge against you. Then there is always the knucklehead who thinks sending you a message through a son or daughter is a good idea. “Tell your mom we don’t like the...”

3. It’s lonely at the top. Any CEO will tell you that, and it is true in this job too. People make friends with their co-workers, but your co-workers know that the relationship is different even if you don’t think it is.

4. You live between the rock and the hard place. Your job is to navigate that space between countervailing forces, parents and teachers, students and taxpayers, board members and staff, just to name a few. There is inherent stress in that space.

A wise old superintendent described the job with this story: Picture yourself walking through a meadow on a beautiful sunny day. In the distance you see a row of trees, swaying in the cool breeze. As you get closer, you see a little monkey out in front of the trees, jumping up and down and screeching as only a monkey can do. He is throwing things and yelling at you. But you think to yourself, it’s only one monkey, I may get a little dirty, but I can deal with one little monkey. So you walk closer and as you approach the trees you notice that the breeze has died down, but the trees are still swaying, the screeching is getting louder and all manner of stuff is being thrown at you. The whole forest is filled with monkeys, and they are mad at YOU! Every superintendent has a day or two like this.

Excited about that new job? Of course you are! Because to quote War Daddy, it’s “the best job you ever had.” Every evening when you lay your head on the pillow, you do it with the knowledge that you did something to help kids today. There is nothing like it in the world.

Board members, I write this for you as well as for the new superintendents. You have a new member on your team. Help them out whenever you can. Set goals, set boundaries, set expectations and talk through them. Be supportive, insightful and help them understand there will always be monkeys.
What is the best piece of advice you received as a new board member? 

Several years ago NSBA asked experienced board members to share insights about their first year of service on a school board. The following ideas may help make the transition a little more productive.

Good luck and enjoy your service to public education.

• Get to know what your role is as a board member, develop yourself in many ways, set goals for yourself, be positive, know your limits, and above all listen. --Jo Ann Beamer, board member, Ohio

• Do not be in a hurry to do something. It takes time to develop governance skills. --Jill Wynns, board member, California

• I am only one of five voting members and not a power of one. --Richard Asadoorian, board member, California

• Read and learn your board policies and state law regarding school boards. --Ginny Moe, board member, South Carolina

• Remember, you were elected by citizens. Try to carry their voices and needs. --Cynthia Shabb, board member, North Dakota

• Once a decision is made you should support the decision. If you disagree, try to change the decision. --James R Dykeman, Jr., board member, Massachusetts

• If it is not good enough for my child, it is not good enough for any child. --Bill Kress, board member, New York

• Read your school state laws and codes and ask questions about anything you don't understand. --Terisa Fitzpatrick, board member, Illinois.

• As long as you are working in the best interest for the students, vote your conscience. --Mary Mathes, board member, Indiana

• Read everything and to be prepared. -- Iris Lane, board member, Virginia

• If you feel like you are overwhelmed, you are micromanaging. --Jim Butt, board member, Pennsylvania

• Be respectful of the opinions and positions of your fellow board members. --Scott M. Johnson, board member, New York

• Your primary constituents are the students -- who do not vote. --Charles Wilson, board member, Virginia

• Change takes time. Start slow and build to fundamental change. --Sheldon Wigdor, retired board member, California

Leaving the board doesn’t mean you have to say goodbye

by KASB Assistant Executive Director Carol Pitts

KASB’s Associate Member Program is a perfect fit for board members who have left the board of education, yet want to remain involved and informed. Associate members are entitled to all the privileges of membership except the right to vote and hold elective office.

The knowledge and experience you have gained from your time on the board of education means you have a unique perspective regarding the future of public education in Kansas. By becoming a KASB Associate Member, you will have opportunities to be involved in helping our state develop a new school finance formula and school accreditation system, just to name two of the important policy decisions facing our state.

The fee for the membership is $50 per year (July 1 - June 30). You will continue to receive the “School Board Review,” have access to advocacy and research publications and can register and attend KASB seminars, meetings and our annual convention. You are also welcome to subscribe to the KASB Daily News Briefs.

Watch for more details in early July, or give KASB a call to learn more!
The Kansas Supreme Court, on June 30, stayed a decision by a lower court that would have increased school funding by approximately $50 million immediately.

Four days before, a three-judge panel found the state’s new block grant school funding system unconstitutional and issued a temporary order that would require funding based on student weightings under the former formula.

The panel ordered the state to restore approximately $50 million in local option budget and capital outlay equalization aid removed under the block grant exclusively from lower wealth districts.

Find the panel’s decision online at: www.shawneecourt.org/DocumentCenter/View/532

On Monday, June 29, Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt filed a motion to block the panel’s ruling.

Schmidt said the panel’s order was unprecedented and accused it of playing politics because it delivered its opinion just moments after the Legislature officially ended the 2015 Legislative Session on Friday, June 26. Schmidt’s motion is online at: https://ag.ks.gov/docs/default-source/documents/20150629motiontostay.pdf?sfvrsn=2

But early Tuesday, June 30, attorneys representing schools suing the state filed a motion asking the court to enforce the decision from the three-judge panel.

“The state has been repeatedly warned of the dangers of continuing down the path of unconstitutional funding,” attorneys for Schools for Fair Funding argued.

Late Tuesday, as the fiscal year ended, the state Supreme Court said the state made a basic showing required to support its request for a stay of the panel’s order. In the one-page order, Chief Justice Lawton Nuss said, “The court recognizes the need for swift resolution of the equity portion of this case. An order soon will be issued outlining an expedited briefing schedule and setting an oral argument date for this issue.”

KASB has urged state leaders to comply with the ruling of the three-judge panel.

On Monday, June 29, KASB Associate Executive Director Mark Tallman and KASB Attorney Lori Church held a webinar discussing the case. A recording of the webinar is available online at: https://kasb.adobeconnect.com/p1f3bvdjrje.

Support materials from the webinar are available on the KASB website at www.kasb.org/legiswebinars.

Welcome new Board Members!

by KASB Assistant Executive Director Carol Pitts

KASB welcomes newly elected school board members who took office July 1. We hope you find this important public service fulfilling. KASB stands ready to help you any way we can.

This is the last group of board members who will take office on July 1. The Kansas Legislature moved local elections from April of odd-numbered years to November of odd-numbered years, so board members elected in 2017 will take office the second Monday in January of 2018. Board members elected this April will serve an extra six months, until January of 2020.

By the way, we hope no one who took office July 1 expected a paycheck. School board members are the only elected officials in Kansas who by law cannot receive compensation from the body they serve.

It’s a balancing act. Randy Weseman, KASB assistant executive director for operations, and members of school boards discuss budgeting issues during a recent workshop for new board members.

“If you have questions or want to learn more about these services, please call 800.432.2471

“Serving Educational Leaders, Inspiring Student Success”

isn’t just our motto, it’s our purpose!

Services supported by your KASB dues include advocacy, lobbying, research, communications and association publications and information on special topics. And by being a member, you gain access to a wide variety of programs, products and services developed just for you!

We understand public education and we’re here to support you!

Being a member of KASB gives you access to what you need when you need it.
New school finance ruling explained
by KASB Associate Executive Director Mark Tallman

A three-judge panel has found parts of the new block grant funding law for public schools unconstitutional because it shortchanges some students and taxpayers without any educational basis.

The court found that legislation passed this year reduces funding for many districts while leaving others untouched and essentially freezes funding for all districts without taking into account changes in students or costs.

On an appeal from the state, the Kansas Supreme Court has paused action on the three-judge panel's ruling and has said it would request written and oral arguments soon.

The latest decision comes one year after the Kansas Supreme Court ruled the school finance system was violating the state constitution because it failed to provide equitable funding in two areas. The first was local option budgets, which pay for part of school district operating costs. The second was capital outlay funding, which is used for building construction, repair, remodeling and equipment.

Both of these programs are funded primarily by local property taxes, but the state had created aid programs to compensate school districts for significant differences in local wealth. Without this assistance, property taxes in low wealth districts would have to be much higher than wealthier districts, or would raise much less funding for students. For example, a one mill levy raises between $20 and $50 per pupil in 72 school districts; between $50 and $75 in 92 school districts; between $75 and $100 in 42 districts; between $100 and $200 in 58 districts; and between $200 and $500 in 15 districts.

In other words, the bottom quarter of school districts in terms of local property wealth require mill levies four to 10 times higher than the top quarter of districts to raise the same amount per pupil.

In 2014, there was no disputing state aid for Local Option Budgets had failed to keep up with LOB costs, which meant significantly higher property taxes in lower wealth districts; and the state stopped paying ANY state aid for capital outlay, which meant districts had to rely exclusively on local mill levies, with the vast disparities noted above.

In response to the court, the 2014 Legislature passed a bill to fully fund the estimated cost of these programs, adding about $130 million. School districts adopted their budgets and mill levies last August based on state aid formulas. However, the actual cost to fully fund the two aid programs turned out to be about $50 million more than expected. Here is why:

LOB aid was $35.4 million higher than expected because a change in the factors used to calculate aid resulted in a higher entitlement for each district. The change did not provide these districts with a higher LOB (i.e. more money to spend); rather, it reduced the amount of property tax required to fund the budget. In fact, statewide LOB property taxes dropped by $91.6 million between 2013-14 and 2014-15, mostly in lower-wealth districts that had been forced to raise taxes to make up for the state shortfall.

Capital outlay aid was $18.6 million higher than expected as districts raised their local capital outlay mill levies to receive more state matching funds after four years with no state aid created a backlog of school building and equipment needs.

Governor Brownback originally recommended the full amount needed to fund these additional costs, but Senate Bill 7, which the Legislature passed and the Governor signed, changed the state aid formulas to cut funding back to the original estimated level. That meant district budgets were cut about $50 million in the middle of the school year.

The three-judge panel found this unconstitutional because these cuts fell exclusively on lower wealth districts. Districts with the highest local property values in the state which already could fund schools with much lower tax rates - were not affected by the reductions. However, property poor districts will have to increase mill levies simply to raise the same level of LOB funding, and will receive less funding for buildings and equipment simply because their mill levies raise less per pupil. In addition, the reduced funding level was then continued for the next two years under the block grant program. The panel ordered the state to restore lost funding.

The panel also adopted a temporary restraining order against the new block grant program, which is designed to freeze school operating budgets at last year’s levels for the next two years.

Under the block grants, districts that have increased enrollment, more special needs students or more high cost programs will not receive any additional funding unless approved by a legislative committee (from funding deducted from all other districts). That means districts with the greatest need for funding would receive less money per pupil. At the same time, districts with fewer regular or special needs students will receive the same amount of money - which translates into more dollars per pupil.

The three-judge panel said that general state aid under the block grants must be distributed based on actual enrollment, weighted for special needs and programs.

The Governor and Legislature have stated the block grant program is a temporary bridge while a new school finance formula is developed. However, a new formula could have been adopted without repealing the previous formula - as has been the case every other time in state history.

What has never been explained - and what the court could not accept - is the justification for cutting per pupil funding in some districts but not in others, requiring higher property taxes in some districts but not in others, and allowing some districts to raise more revenue than others, without any articulated educational reason.

The Kansas Supreme Court has promised a quick hearing on the decision. Perhaps an explanation will be offered there.
Fiscal year ends short of projections; more budget problems ahead
by KASB Communications Specialist Scott Rothschild

Kansas closed the books on fiscal year 2015 on Tuesday and for schools and other government services that rely on tax dollars, there was not much to cheer about.

The month of June revenue collections were $22.5 million, or 4.1 percent, less than estimates, and Fiscal Year 2015 finished $32.8 million under estimates, or down 0.6 percent. And these are based on official state revenue estimates that had been lowered twice during the year.

So, for new fiscal year 2016, the budget is struggling right off the bat despite significant tax increases that take effect today. The most notable is an increase in the state sales tax from 6.15 cents per dollar to 6.5 cents per dollar. Still, despite falling below projections, $70 million more in taxes was collected in FY 2015 than FY 2014.

"While receipts in June were below estimates, we are pleased the fiscal year to date receipts were less than 1 percent below estimates and outperformed last fiscal year," Kansas Department of Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan said.

But Mark Tallman, KASB associate executive director for advocacy, noted that the $70 million revenue increase represented only a 1.3 percent growth from the previous year.

That is not enough growth to sustain spending needs in public schools and other areas and shows the effect of huge income tax cuts passed in 2012, Tallman said.

The inflation rate for calendar year 2014 was 1.6 percent and the state’s population grew by 0.3 percent.

"While better than a decrease, this rate of revenue growth is less than half the growth rate for personal income in the state of 2.9 percent for 2014," he said.

"This is a clear indication of the impact of state income tax cuts. It also explains why the state is struggling to provide funding for K-12 education, schools are struggling to keep salaries competitive, deal with rising enrollment and more students with special needs, and reach higher achievement levels," Tallman said.

Westar Energy STEM Innovation Awards Submission Deadline July 13
by KASB Assistant Executive Director Carol Pitts

Three $3,000 grants to support innovative project-based instruction in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are available from Westar Energy. This is the second year for the grant program, and Westar Energy has increased the number of awards available from two to three this year.

The funds can be used to increase student interest and academic achievement in the STEM disciplines as applied to electrical energy. A focus on increasing the diversity of students involved in STEM education is of particular interest.

The awards are a partnership between Westar Energy, the Kansas Association of School Boards and the Kansas State Department of Education. A selection committee, composed of personnel from Westar Energy, KASB and KSDE will select the recipients.

The deadline for grant submissions is July 13. Awards will be announced July 27 and funding presented by September 1. All grant recipients are recognized during the KASB Annual Conference and asked to present a breakout session on their project. For more information and the online application, see www.kasb.org/WestarSTEM.

Last year’s recipients included Wichita USD 259 and Parsons USD 503.

The physics department at Wichita North High School, USD 259, received a $3,000 STEM Innovation Award to support expansion of physics offerings to students and increase enrollment in physics classes. North High used the funds to purchase kits for students to use in collecting, saving, viewing and graphing data with multiple projects including sound waves, laws of motion, speed, energy flow and the atom. The project teaches real-world applications to non-traditional physics students and connects the students to the physics they encounter in real life.

The second $3,000 award was presented to Parsons High School, USD 503. The funding supported the next phase in a project started eight years ago. A three-fourths scale Humvee, powered by renewable energy, was designed, engineered and constructed by students over several years. The Humvee was on display during the KASB Annual Conference in Overland Park in December 2014. The Westar Innovation Award was used to turn the concept for a carport-style charger using solar panels as the renewable energy into a fully operational station.

Earnings potential of majoring in STEM Education

Using recent Census Data, a new report from Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce looks at the lifetime earnings potential of various college majors. "The Economic Value of College Majors" notes that STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), health, and business majors are the highest paying, leading to average annual wages of $37,000 or more at the entry level and an average of $65,000 or more annually over the course of a recipient's career.

The report finds that of the 25 highest-paid majors, economics and business economics are the only two that are not in a STEM field.

The full report, published in May 2015, can be found here: https://cew.georgetown.edu/reports/valueofcollegemajors.
July/August At-A-Glance

July
7   KSDE Budget Workshop, Garden City
8   KSDE New Supts Budget Workshop, Salina
9   KSDE Budget Workshop, Oakley
10  KSDE Budget Workshop, Greenbush
13  KSDE Budget Workshop, Salina
14-15 Kansas State Board of Ed Meeting - Topeka
16  KSDE Budget Workshop, El Dorado
16-17 KASB Leadership for Tomorrow, Kansas City
17  KSDE Budget Workshop, Topeka

August
10  KASB Attorney on Call
11-12 Kansas State Board of Ed Meeting, Topeka
29  KASB Board of Directors, Legislative Committee & Workers Compensation Fund Trustees Meetings

New Clerks Workshops, 7/15/15 KASB Topeka & 7/16/15 Hays, Smoky Hill
In this half-day session (choose either Topeka or Hays), new board clerks (and those looking for a refresher course) learn what you need to know to do your job as clerk of the board, including legal and procedural issues and the latest guidance on open meetings and open records. This seminar gives you the tools you need to work effectively and efficiently with your board members and superintendents.

Student Discipline Workshop, 7/29/15 KASB Topeka
Increasing student achievement and maintaining a safe learning environment for students and staff alike require good policies and processes. This seminar helps administrators and board members understand Kansas student discipline requirements, options, federal and state mandates, state reporting requirements and procedures to follow in imposing student suspension and expulsions.

Section 504 Workshop, 8/3/15 Clearwater (Two Sessions)
These half-day workshops (choose from a morning or afternoon session) cover Section 504 for Students, explore the differences between Section 504, IDEA and ADA, and discuss staff, parent and patron concerns with Section 504.

Board Leadership Team Workshop
8/4/15 Hays Rose Garden Banquet Hall & 8/6/15 KASB Topeka
Students succeed when the district is led by a strong board-superintendent team. This one-day seminar for the school board leadership team (president, vice president, superintendent, clerk) focuses on roles and responsibilities and gives district teams time to work together. You will gain the leadership skills you need, from chairing the meeting to handling disagreements and difficult situations. While the focus is on the leadership team, this workshop is open to all board members.

Find detailed agendas and register online at www.kasb.org.