Work continues on K-12 committee report; education groups offer response

As of publication time, the Special Committee on K-12 Student Success hadn’t finalized its report to the 2016 Legislature, but a draft copy of the report by Committee Chairman Ron Highland, a Republican state representative from Wamego, contained numerous proposals to make major changes to the Kansas school system.

And the draft by Highland, who also serves as chairman of the House Education Committee, was critical of Kansas public schools.

Highland’s draft stated: “Based on the data and the outcome information provided, it is evident the K-12 system currently employed by our state is not producing the desired learning. The funding mechanism needs to be redesigned to focus on the individual student.”

KASB, United School Administrators of Kansas, and the Kansas School Superintendents Association issued a point-by-point response. Both the draft report and joint response are available in the center column of this page: www.kasb.org/key issues

KASB data given to the committee showed that Kansas ranks eighth in student outcomes while ranking 27th in per pupil spending. Every state that ranked higher than Kansas spends more per pupil.

Despite this systemwide performance of outcomes and efficiency, Highland’s draft also stated “The national ranking shows Kansas students are scoring about average or below compared to other states. But when compared to other countries, the US is falling behind, with a ranking of 29th in the world.”

Highland’s draft report was tabled at the committee’s Jan. 5 meeting and referred to the Kansas Legislative Research Department. State Rep. Ron Ryckman Jr., R-Olathe, said he wanted the research department to link the report’s findings to testimony given to the committee.

The report is seen by some as the starting point of Republican legislative leaders in devising a new school finance formula to replace the block grant approved last year that essentially froze school funding levels.

Highland’s recommendations included:

- Repealing the bonding statute; placing strict limits on school bonding; and possible legislative oversight and approval of any school bond issue.
- Basing at-risk funding on poverty information provided by the Kansas Department of Labor and the Kansas Department of Revenue. Any application to receive funding by a parent or guardian should be available for audit.
- Outsourcing to the private sector many non-classroom functions. The report says functions that could be provided more efficiently include transportation,
Spangler is new director of KASB Insurance Agency sales and operations

Rod Spangler is the new assistant executive director of insurance services at KASB.

Prior to joining KASB, Spangler worked for American Fidelity Assurance, where he served in various positions for the past 18 years.

Spangler comes to his new position upon David Shriver’s return to the KASB legal department where he will be handling negotiation and employment cases along with helping the department with members’ calls and on-site training.

Coming over to KASB was a natural fit for Spangler.

He is familiar with Kansas schools and KASB members from his work at American Fidelity in the benefits arena, has been a long time member of the board of the Kansas Association of School Business Officials and also serves on the Shawnee Heights USD 450 Foundation Board.

His wife, Jodelle, teaches for Shawnee Heights USD 450 and they have two daughters, Chelsey and Mariah, in high school and a son, Logan, in college.

Rod has an odd combination of hobbies — he is an avid motorcyclist and golfer.

In his new position, Rod directs KASB Insurance Agency sales and operations. KASB provides workers compensation, property/casualty, student accident, personal line options and gas service solutions to public schools in Kansas.
Meeting All Kids Needs the Derby Way

Ten participants in one of the three most recent Meeting All Kids Needs tours literally saw children growing up before their eyes.

From the first stop, hearing about Derby’s Parents as Teachers program to the last, visiting with high school sophomore and juniors, school leaders from across the state viewed first hand buildings and programs the Derby district has designed to help students of every age find success.

This is the second time MAKN has made a stop in USD 260; the first was in 2008, the third iteration of the annual event.

The Littlest Ones: Parents as Teachers

The tour started with meeting the leaders of Derby’s PAT program, who shared information about the program, including the fact the wait list to get into the program was almost as long as the list of the families it serves. After 20 years, Derby families know the program will benefit their kids.

Although no kids were in the building that day, the MAKN team visited the classroom used when children are brought in for playtime. Filled with activity centers, toys, books and a large elliptical rug for group time, the room just oozed exploration, play time and learning.

The Opportunity Project Learning Center

The next stop was TOP, a high quality Early Childhood center for one- to five-year-olds, and the brainchild of Wichita businessman and philanthropist Barry Downing, which was established 13 years ago. As a child who had grown up in poverty and had seen first hand its numbing effects on child development, Downing wanted to create opportunities for a new generation of students dragged down by poverty.

The group got to spend some time with Mr. Downing and Cornelia Stevens, the executive director of the program. After hearing from them, the MAKN team toured the building.

Perhaps the most inspiring room the team visited was the art room, which is modeled after an effective program developed in Italy called the Reggio Emilia approach. Fifteen or so children were engaged in various art projects around the room. The team consistently commented how focused, yet relaxed, each child was pursuing his or her activity. Many also commented on how a bookshelf with trinkets that stood in the middle of the room was never bothered, a far cry from what most of them remembered about raising this age group in their own home.

There are two other TOP buildings in Wichita that are in the Wichita USD 259 district. One serves an area of town that is primarily African-American and the other in a predominantly Hispanic area.

The MAKN teams left TOP with a clear picture of exemplary Early Childhood education looked like.

Derby Hills Elementary School

Next, the MAKN team visited with James Moffett, the principal at DHES. The focus of the visit was the many programs the building had put into place to meet the needs of its students and their parents. Derby Hills could qualify for Title 1 support but the district has other schools with much greater needs, so it does not receive any Title 1 support. As a result, the building staff works hard to offer great support without additional resources.

He shared with the MAKN team core beliefs of the school, including its motto, “We love you and there is nothing you can do about it!” He also shared the mindset of the building, “Being college and career ready is the norm, not the exception.”

As a tool to reach this goal, beginning with kindergarten, students go on field trips that include visits to technical colleges career colleges and four-year schools, including WSU.

The final part of the presentation noted the areas the school monitors to ensure student progress: social, emotional, physical, and academic needs and the building of meaningful relations.

Derby North Middle School

The newest Derby school was the next stop on the tour.

The MAKN tour started meeting the building principal, Jeff Smith, who welcomed the MAKN team to his school, which just open this fall. The building was part of a nearly $70 million bond issue passed in 2102.

After welcoming the team and giving background on the district transition from a sixth grade center/middle school to two grades 6-8 middle schools, the team toured the thoughtfully designed building.

It was clear Mr. Smith, among other, had worked tirelessly in the design phase to make the building work for freshly-arrived sixth graders as well as the 8th graders whose next big stop would be the 2000-student high school.

Several of the top features were the spacious “cafetorium,” the ample gym space, a well-lighted and spacious library and well-equipped science rooms.

Safety and security features were also evident in the egress/exit protocol and the the hallway design that allowed for easy movement of students as well easy faculty supervision.

The team didn’t get to see many students until the end of our visit, as on that particular day students were on a variety of field trips that not only expanded their world but also allowed for professional development time for the “special” teachers (PE, art, etc), who were working with the Employability Skills Framework to help determine their role in preparing students for College and Career Readiness through soft skills.

Derby High School

The last stop on a very busy day was Derby High School, which opened in 1994, but has been added onto several times in order to accommodate student growth and program needs.

District leaders have been very purposeful about keeping one high school in town, as it allows the community to keep its focus on the activities and academics of one building. One of the ways they help students be successful in such a large building is to enroll all freshman in Success 101. (There is a required class for all 6th graders, MS 101, that focuses on transition issues and opportunities. Key components of the class include organization, grade checks, digital citizenship, writing, problem solving, novel studies, and character education. All of these topics are taught through the lens of transition and making a successful move to middle school.)

Success 101 meets three student goals. This is the third year of the program.

First, it serves as an orientation class for the incoming freshman. They get

...continued on page 5
Enrollment projections, for free

KASB has for many years provided and enrollment projection service to its members for a fee. Starting this year, KASB is offering it to all members for free.

Research Specialist Ted Carter

You can find the method used by KASB was developed by former Research Specialist Jim Hays. I have taken his approach and found a way to automate the process for district-level projections by grade and by free and reduced-price lunch status.

The following describes the methods used for developing the Enrollment Projections contained in the basic report.

Initial Data
KASB acquires unaudited enrollment counts and the percent enrolled who qualify for free lunch, reduced-price lunch, and full-price lunch from the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) via their Comparative Performance & Fiscal System (CPFS - http://cpfs.ksde.org/).

KASB acquires county-level birth data by month from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment via their Annual Summary of Vital Statistics (http://www.kdheks.gov/hci/annsumm.html).

Ratio of Birth to First Grade Enrollment
Total resident live births by county and school year are calculated using monthly births from September of one year through August of the following year; consistent with the birth dates used to determine age of eligibility for attending first grade. The birth data by county is then tied to the district-level enrollment data based on all counties that the district boundaries cross.

Because of some of the challenges with kindergarten data, KASB utilizes a ratio of births by school year to first grade enrollments seven years later; when the children would be turning seven years old and therefore be eligible for first-grade enrollment.

This ratio, which serves as a comparison between children born in the district to the number of students enrolling in first grade within the district seven years later, serves as the basis for the enrollment estimates for the district. Limitations of this ratio include the fact that it does not take into account children moving into or out of the district’s boundaries, and also that the county to school district relationship is not a perfect one; as other school district boundaries also cross the counties used for many districts’ calculations.

In order to estimate the first grade enrollment numbers for future years, a five-year rolling average is utilized. Such an average is calculated by determining the average ratio for the past five years in order to create the ratio for the first year of the projection, then taking the ratio for the past four years plus the ratio calculated for the first year of the projection and averaging them in order to create the ratio for the second year of the projection, and so forth. Rolling averages are commonly utilized in order to minimize the impact of short-term fluctuations or deviations on the overall projections.

The calculated ratios for five years’ worth of school years are then applied to the actual resident live births in order to determine estimated first grade enrollment numbers.

Cohort Survival Ratios
For all other grade levels 2 through 12, a cohort survival ratio is calculated and utilized. The cohort survival ratio determines the relationship between the number of students at a particular grade level one year and the number of students at the next grade level the following year. For kindergarten, the ratio is calculated backwards; determining the ratio of the number of students in first grade one year and the number of students in kindergarten the year prior. Again for these calculations a five-year rolling average is utilized.

Lunch Status
In order to estimate the enrollment numbers for student participation in the National School Lunch Program, a ratio of each group to the total number of students in K-12 for the same year is calculated, and again a five year rolling average is utilized to project numbers for the next five years.

Custom Reports
KASB will also be offering custom reports, which can include school-level projections, estimates for student participation in Special Education Services and English Language Learner Services, race/ethnicity, and a variety of other factors. Calculations can also be modified based on knowledge of new housing or employers moving into the district and so forth.

These custom reports are offered based on an hourly fee.

The enrollment projections can be found by visiting kasb.org/research and clicking on “Interactive Reports” in the menu bar.

For more information contact Research Specialist Ted Carter at tcarter@kasb.org or call KASB Research at 800-432-2471.
**KASB Staff Spotlight: Melissa Holder**

Being the new kid in school is always a slippery slope. There are new names and faces to learn and new procedures to familiarize yourself with. And it can be a little awkward in the beginning. Luckily Melissa Holder, KASB’s new executive administrative assistant fit right in- without that awkward stage.

Originally from Great Bend, Melissa has been a resident of Topeka since 1988. She began her office career with the Kansas State Department of Education, where she worked as an administrative assistant. It was there that she decided that she wanted to work in education. Following her time at KSDE, Melissa went into banking, working for six years as the administrative assistant to the marketing director. She then went to work at Personalized Broker Service for almost 10 years before starting at KASB.

In 2002, Melissa earned her Bachelor’s in Business Administration from Baker University. And in 2015 she earned her Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) designation from the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), a not-for-profit organization that provides resources to administrative professionals to connect and learn.

As the executive assistant to the executive director, Melissa not only works directly with Dr. John Heim, but she also works with the KASB Board of Directors. In addition, she works with local businesses and organizations to schedule meeting space in the KASB office.

Although she’s still the new girl on the block, Melissa is very happy to be a part of KASB. “I’d forgotten what it’s like to be new.” But she has found KASB to be a “very welcoming environment.”

“I absolutely love it here,” Melissa said. “I see the value in the organization and why it exists. The employees are very engaged.” She also said that she loves the “longevity” of the employees of KASB. “That really says something about an association.” ~Shaneice McNabney, smcnabney@kasb.org.

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**Meeting All Kids Needs**

continued from page 3

A chance to have a class that allows faculty to make student feel welcomed and connected in a very large “pond,” and through the use of upper class advisors, get to start to meet a broader number of students.

Second, it serves as the opportunity for the district to teach its financial literacy curriculum. The class is not mandated for graduation for a couple of reasons, but the students starting their freshman year in the building get an excellent opportunity to learn the basics of budgeting, the use of credit and other important real-life skills. The culminating activity is to take part in Reality U, which is sponsored by the district’s Communities in Schools partnership.

And third, it gives student the opportunity to start considering what occupations that may, or may not, fit them well after high school. By starting to develop that knowledge they have a much better grasp of what high school classes might be important, but also allow them to think about steps after graduation that would make their plans become a reality.

The MAKN team first met with long-time DHS staffer Principal Tim Hamblin, who explained the program, and then met with six of the upper class advisors in a Q and A. After a robust discussion, the team visited a Success 101 classroom engaged in a realistic personal budgeting discussion.

At the end of the day, he Derby participants returned to the conference hotel and started visiting with the others who made the other two tours and compared notes. All three groups proudly noted THEY had been on the best tour.

It’s clear more policy makers need to visit schools to see what programs have been developed across the state to meet all students’ needs. Without that kind of information, they are making important decisions using incomplete and/or inaccurate information, which is such a shame as our schools are eager to share their efforts.

It’s simple…when you visit, you learn! ~Tom Krebs, tkrebs@kasb.org.
Wichita, Haysville dedication, professionalism, exemplified southern leg of Meeting All Kids Needs tour

Visits to two National Blue Ribbon schools in Haysville USD 261, and an improving middle school and the Levy Special Education Center, both in Wichita USD 259, were featured during the “southern” leg of the Meeting All Kids Needs tour prior to December’s KASB annual conference.

Along the way, we saw dedicated, enthusiastic professionals preparing students for success at multiple levels.

Terrell Davis, principal of Truesdell Middle School, exemplified the drive and energy of many teachers and administrators we spoke with.

Three years ago, Truesdell was the lowest performing middle school in Kansas. Now it is ranked among the best. The school had more than 4,500 office referrals for discipline problems several years ago. Now that number has decreased to 1,700.

Principal Davis said staff at “the ‘Dell’” are focused on one thing: “Keeping the main thing, the main thing.” What is the main thing? The kids.

“When they step foot on our property, this is utopia,” Davis said.

Davis said he recruits leading teacher candidates in college, and his staff conducts as much one-on-one time with students as possible.

In fact, staff members hold a “draft day” where the teachers vie for the kids they want under their wing for the school year.

Davis said you would expect that teachers would try to avoid drafting the most difficult students. But, he said, the exact opposite is true: Teachers compete for the right to try to help those who need the most help.

Truesdell has one of the country’s best middle school rocketry teams and a program called Gear Up, which includes former Kansas University basketball great Lynnette Woodard, helps students get on track for college by setting goals, individual learning plans and sponsoring summer college visits.

Earlier, the tour hit Campus High School and Oatville Elementary; both of which have won National Blue Ribbon School awards.

Campus High has a new program where students can earn their Certified Nursing Assistant credential. It already has a waiting list.

The school also has a coffee shop run by students who receive credit for consumer economics and get experience in running a business. The students do all the marketing, management, and operation of the business.

“This is a very good learning project for the students and the school board,” said Haysville USD 261 School Board President Susan Walston. The board had to provide some upfront money, and the students have been paying off the loan like any business.

In the culinary arts program, students prepared a delicious lunch for us of club sandwiches and tomato bisque.

Earlier, students in the International Baccalaureate and AVID programs spoke about how the programs had enhanced their education.

“It is extremely rigorous,” one student said of the IB program. “But I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

Administrators at Campus High School said the multitude of programs are meant to meet students where they’re at.

At Oatville Elementary, the halls were full of excited students being led by their teachers as they searched for clues in their hunt for the Gingerbread Man.

Principal Shane Dent said the school pores over student data to help students.

Our tour ended at the Levy Special Education Center in Wichita, which serves students with severe intellectual disabilities and health impairments.

We watched numerous teachers working one-on-one with students, helping them with their individual needs. One young man was going to graduate from the school and had a job lined up.

We saw caring adults help students in the hydrotherapy pool. Kimberly Cotton, the administrator at Levy, called the facility Wichita’s “hidden treasure.”

Reflecting back on the tour, I looked at a photo I took of what was written on one of the classroom doors at Oatville Elementary.

On the door, under the title, “Classroom Rules,” were the following: Be Ready to Learn; Dream Big; Be Respectful; Do Your Best; Work Hard; Laugh A Lot; Practice Makes Perfect; Try New Things; Be A Good Friend; Follow Directions; Be Honest; Mistakes Are OK; Positive Attitude; and Ask Lots of Questions.

All those sentiments were displayed in one way or another by the many educators and students we saw and spoke with that day. ~Scott Rothschild, srothschild@kasb.org

Former Kansas University basketball great Lynnette Woodard helps students from Wichita’s Truesdell Middle School. The girls are part of the Gear Up college-bound group.
In the afternoon, the action shifts to the Capitol via shuttle buses where participants will have an opportunity to take in the legislative process as well as getting strategic tips on lobbying from former legislators and current lobbyists Diane Gjerstad, Wichita USD 259, and Dave Heinemann, Schools for Quality Education. KASB staff will also be available to help you see and do as much as possible.

Buses will return you to the conference for the 5 p.m. legislative reception.

The next morning, enjoy a breakfast, then hear from G.A. Buie, the new United School Administrators of Kansas Executive Director, and KASB's Mark Tallman. Deputy Commissioners Brad Neuenswander and Dale Dennis will cover the the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the latest in school finance news.

Also, Kathleen Branch, NSBA, will be skyped in to bring participants up to date on what's going on in Washington, including the latest on the rules-writing process for ESSA, which will fill in a number of details not articulated in the statute.

To register for the seminar, visit www.kasb.org/store/events/registration.

The report also says that schools are performing many tasks beyond academics and specifically mentioned special education.

“This also greatly increases spending. Perhaps the overall concept of what a school should provide needs to be defined. Consideration must be given to the degree to which providing non-academic services impacts learning, particularly with regard to special education.

“The goal is to help each student, including Special Education students, attain their highest level of proficiency. Mainstreaming has some benefit, but the good of the individual must outweigh any benefit realized by this practice, and the impact on other students in mainstreamed classrooms must also be taken into account. Perhaps other agencies would be better suited for these tasks associated with helping each special needs child pursue and attain their personal best,” the report said.

The report also cited the “burden” of federal funding as requiring costly data collection, testing and record keeping.

The report says that both small and large districts have large costs and that the optimal size of a district “from an efficiency standpoint appears to be between 1,500 and 2,500 students.” ~Scott Rothschild, srothschild@kasb.org

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Resources available for 2016 School Board Appreciation Month

KASB joins state school board associations from around the U.S. in celebrating School Board Appreciation Month in January. KASB has created a website that includes a logo and other resources to get you started, including a customizable certificate of appreciation, a sample media release and tips to get others involved.

Be sure to follow #thankBOE during January! Find all the resources at www.kasb.org/thankBOE.

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