Southwest Kansas school districts show diversity

When one thinks about diversity in Kansas public schools, the larger urban districts, such as Wichita, Topeka and Kansas City, may come to mind.

But in Kansas, diversity is everywhere. KASB’s Leadership for Tomorrow experienced this fact during a recent trip to Montezuma USD 371 and Dodge City USD 443. The two districts are less than 30 miles apart, which in southwest Kansas is just down the road.

But they are vastly different.

A majority of Dodge City’s students are Hispanic, non-native English speakers while in rural Montezuma and its partner district, Copeland USD 371, many students leave school after eighth grade because they come from Mennonite families, who speak Low German, and must work on the farm.

The challenges and successes of these districts show that local school boards are best positioned to respond to the unique needs of their communities and that local control fosters more parent investment in children’s education.

Dodge City USD 443 Superintendent Alan Cunningham has worked for 43 years in the district and plans to retire after this upcoming school year. He said when he first arrived as an elementary teacher, all his students were white.

The transformation since then might mirror the transformation seen in major cities. There is no Statue of Liberty on the plains, but people drawn by the beef industry from all over the globe have landed in Dodge City with up to 20 different languages spoken in the halls of the schools.

The district has 7,100 students and nearly 60 percent are not native English speakers. Most of those speak Spanish but many other languages are spoken,

...continued on page 5
Education Commissioner Watson talks about next steps of "Kansans Can"

Kansas Education Commissioner Randy Watson says the "Kansans Can" effort will shift "pretty dramatically" this Fall from data-gathering to implementation of the vision for Kansas public education.

In a recent meeting with the Coalition of Innovative School Districts (CISD), Watson noted that October will mark the end of the first year of "Kansans Can," the State Board of Education’s vision that Kansas Leads the World in the Success of Each Student.

Now that Year One is ending, Watson said, it's time to shift the focus to accreditation and the five desired outcomes identified by the board. Those outcomes are: kindergarten readiness; increasing graduation rates; increasing the percent of students completing a credential or pursuing postsecondary education; each student will have an individual plan of study focused on career interest; and social/emotional factors relative to student success are to be measured locally.

Watson wants state educators to see what they can “squeeze out” of a system that serves majority race students who don’t live in poverty well. For others, Watson said, educators will need to redesign schools.

“Do you tweak your existing [model], or redesign it for your community and your culture?” Watson posited. He suggested, as an example, that a middle school or high school could feature a flexible design that includes traditional learning, virtual school, project-based learning or a combination of those factors.

Deputy Commissioner Brad Neuenswander updated the CISD on the department’s continuing efforts to retool the role of state assessments, which are required by law and were used under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to help determine school district accreditation. NCLB’s high-stakes focus on testing is being retooled under its successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It’s likely state test results will also play a smaller role in new accreditation procedures under ESSA.

In addition to reducing the assessment footprint by 60 percent in 2016-17, Neuenswander said, the state is looking at reducing its focus on summative tests in favor of interim assessments. Summative tests measure student learning relative to content standards; interim assessments give teachers a "snapshot" of current progress and can help predict how students will perform on future assessments.

Neuenswander said the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation (CETE) will work this year with pilot districts to have Kansas teachers develop an interim assessment, based on student progress in the fall of the school year, that could ultimately be verified to the point that it could be used to predict student performance on summative tests. “This is a great opportunity for Kansas teachers,” Neuenswander said.

McPherson USD 418 Superintendent Mark Crawford was pleased to hear about the interim assessment focus.

“We’re excited for more authentic assessments that mean something to our students,” Crawford said. “A practitioner-developed, student focused performance system is authentic because teachers use it to inform instruction in the short term. It’s much more powerful than teaching a standard for a whole year in hopes you’ll do well on one high-stakes test.”

~Leah Filter, lfilter@kasb.org

KASB seeks candidates for association President

KASB is seeking candidates for the office of KASB President. The position requires a three-year commitment to serve on the KASB Board of Directors and Executive Committee. Candidates must be serving on a member school board. The deadline for application is Wednesday, August 31.

An online pdf application with additional information can be found at kasb.org/nominating.
KASB membership is represented by 15 regional vice-presidents. These individuals, along with the president, president-elect and past-president, and two ex officio appointees, comprise the KASB Board of Directors. All are also current local board of education members. Regions one through 10 vice-presidents are elected during regional meetings at the annual conference in December. Five additional regions – Regions 11 through 15 – are comprised of the five member school districts with the greatest full time equivalent student populations at the time of regional elections. Each of these boards appoints its representative to the board of directors.

Additional information about KASB’s governance structure can be found online at kasb.org/governance.

**KASB Region 7**
**Gina McGowan**
Ellsworth/Kanopolis/Geneseo USD 327

Gina McGowan is in her second three-year term as KASB Region 7 vice-president. She represents 26 unified school boards in 11 counties.

“I wouldn’t have had the confidence to do some of the things I do at the local, state or national level without the support of KASB staff and other board members,” she said, “They truly have kept me more involved and more accountable for what I should be doing for Kansas kids, teachers and schools!”

McGowan was first elected to the Ellsworth/Kanopolis/Geneseo USD 327 board in July 2007. She has a degree in early childhood special education and elementary education and taught for a few years before leaving to raise her family of two boys.

“Now in my third term, I keep seeking re-election because I love kids and want to support our schools,” she said.

McGowan volunteers weekly in the district’s after school program and logs additional volunteer hours with school and community programs, including head room mother for the past eight years in her boys’ classrooms. She places a priority on being active and visible by attending programs and classroom activities in the district of 600 plus students.

“I love seeing all of the positives that our schools, teachers and students are doing,” McGowan said. “Nothing is better than kids seeing you at school, calling you by name, and giving you a hug.”

McGowan’s board service includes two years as vice-president and two years as president. She is the board’s representative on district’s technology and policy committee and the Smoky Hill Charitable Foundation grant committee. Her passion for making difference in lives of children is clear.

She has served as the lead director of the community Bible school (for 250 kids) for the last nine years, and has volunteered for 16 years with Camp Hope (a camp for kids with cancer), including house parent director. McGowan facilitates the EC3- Ellsworth County Community Cares committee and is co-director and teacher for an after school program called Kids of the Kingdom and Kids with a Mission. She also serves as a substitute Sunday School teacher.

This past year, McGowan handed high school diplomas to some of the students she worked with when they were young children just starting out in the Ellsworth school system. It was, she said, a truly proud moment.

McGowan is a member of this year’s KASB Leadership for Tomorrow class, and values the opportunity to remain active not only in her local school district, but also at the state and national levels.

“I love being more involved with leaders across the state of Kansas,” she said, “and not only supporting kids in my district, but truly feeling involved with kids all over the state and nation.

“I’m blessed to know so many people who believe so strongly and give their all in supporting public schools,” McGowan said.

**KASB Region 10**
**Margaret Nightengale**
Ulysses USD 214

Margaret Nightengale, KASB Region 10 vice-president, serves on the board of education for Ulysses USD 214, a district in southwest Kansas with an enrollment close to 1,800.

Her local board of education service began when the incumbent decided not to run. At the time she had two children in the district and a supportive employer with a vested interest in the local school producing citizens with an employable skill set. Nightengale won the election, beginning her first term in July 2009. She has served as president since 2012.

During her tenure the board has completed a long range plan and facilities study and is continuing to pursue facility improvements. In addition to celebrating the individual successes of USD 214’s students, Nightengale is particularly proud of the positive working relationship the board maintains with the local teachers association. She represents her board on the negotiations team.

She has been president of Leadership Grant County for six years and is active in the local Rotary Club, serving recently as president. She has served as a board member for Communities in Schools, continues to be active in her local church and in her fourth year as a Republican Committee Precinct woman.

Nightengale was appointed to an unexpired term for KASB’s Region 10, then elected in 2010 and reelected in 2013. Region 10 covers 11 counties with 27 unified school districts.

In addition to participating in KASB meetings and events, Nightengale is a 2012 graduate of KASB’s Leadership for Tomorrow program.

“The KASB Board is a great group of individuals who are driven to advocate for and support all students and districts in the State,” she said. “

She points to several advantages gained from involvement with KASB.

“KASB provides great resources for our members and allows lots of opportunities to network and learn about board service,” she said. “I also get great ideas to run by my local board from seeing what other districts are doing and their successes.”
KASB Advocacy Tour sees high turnout

After an eventful May and June in Topeka created a schedule change, the final dates of the annual KASB Advocacy Tour wrapped up this week with six meetings hosted across Kansas.

Starting on June 6 in Emporia and wrapping up almost 45 days later in Salina, the KASB Advocacy team conducted 18 sessions offering an in-depth analysis of education in Kansas.

With more than 400 in attendance at this year’s events, 2016 shaped up to have among the best Advocacy Tour participation over the past several years. Here is a quick breakdown of the attendees over the course of the 6-½ weeks of the tour:

- Total Attendees: 428
- Candidates in Attendance: 81 (not including current legislators)
- Current Legislators & State Board of Education members: 40
- School Board Members in Attendance: 107
- School Professionals in Attendance: 120 (not including superintendents)
- Superintendents in Attendance: 80

Early feedback from the meetings has been positive. “KASB continues to be a reliable source of school-related data,” said State Board of Education Chairman Jim McNiece. “The Summer Advocacy programs I attended were very informative and helped me understand more deeply the issues of the state’s financial challenges.”

KASB’s Executive Director for Advocacy Mark Tallman made a presentation entitled “Best of Times or Worst of Times for Kansas Public Education.”

“Mark Tallman's presentations on school funding are always data driven with a flare for getting to the heart of the issue. KASB is a strong advocate and powerful voice for the students and public schools of Kansas,” McNeice said.

One of the goals of the event was to offer attendees an in-depth and accurate picture of the current data available and how our state measures up. Tallman’s presentation included a detailed analysis and explanation of achievement measurements, investment measurements and an historical look at education investments over time in comparison to other events and factors.

“I found the information provided at the KASB Advocacy tour event in Sublette very informative,” said 122nd District Representative Russ Jennings. “The presentation included unfiltered data that provided significant insight into the history of school finance and school performance as well as the current challenges our schools face. This is a must see presentation for all legislators who want to be fully informed on the issues in a complete and balanced manner.”

Many of the questions posed during the sessions addressed funding and where Kansas ranks compared to other states. While the total percentage of the state budget that goes to education is one of the highest in the nation, an examination of the dollars invested per student shows Kansas falls into the lower half of states overall.

To download a pdf of the powerpoint go to www.kasb.org/keyresources. ~Rob Gilligan, rgilligan@kasb.org
Don’t forget to vote in crucial election on Aug. 2

KASB encourages advocates of education to vote in the Aug. 2 primary, which is considered the most important election in a generation because it will determine the direction of the Kansas Legislature.

A great way to learn more about candidates is to look to groups which have announced their support of candidates and we urge everyone to become familiar with the positions of each group and who they support.

KASB has developed an online tool that shows candidates for the Legislature and which organization(s) supports them. The tool can be accessed at www.kasb.org/endorsementtool.

There is an even better way to find out where candidates stand, however: just ask them. When they come to your door, or at candidate forums or debates, or by just picking up the phone, you can ask the people who want to represent you how they feel about issues important to you. We urge school advocates to get informed and vote and urge their families, friends and colleagues to vote too.

Southwest Kansas school districts show diversity continued from page 1

such as Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, Arabic and others.

The schools are on the front lines of helping these people and their children. Each day, the district serves 8,500 meals and transports 3,000 students. Despite the obstacles of poverty, parent commitment to education shows in its 96 percent daily attendance rate.

The district offers the Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Center to help children get ready for kindergarten and beyond.

The center serves more than 300 children, combining play and learning to the point that when the children graduate to kindergarten they are ahead of their peers.

Bright Beginnings includes a Head Start program, classes for at-risk students and two literacy buses converted to mobile libraries.

Sandra Halling works with Bright Beginnings and is also a member of the Bucklin 459 school board and the KASB Leadership for Tomorrow class.

While driving the bus, she said she could hear the students’ stomachs growling, so she decided meals would accompany the books when the literacy buses made their rounds during the summer.

Bottom line, said Supt. Cunningham, is, “We believe in pre-school education around here and we would do anything we could to increase it.”

He said with more funding, USD 443 could double the size of its preschool but in recent years, dollars from the state have been short.

Cunningham said a district needs three things to educate a student: a teacher who is competent and passionate, resources and time. “All cost money. When money is in short supply, you start whittling away on this,” he said.

Southwest of Dodge City, Jay Zehr oversees a completely different situation.

Zehr is the superintendent of two districts — Montezuma USD 371 and Copeland USD 476 — and he is principal of the elementary school in Copeland.

An inter-district agreement, first struck in the early 1990s, binds the two districts through sharing of personnel and facilities but allows them to each have their own school board and make their own governing decisions. Zehr said he expects there will be more of these in time.

“People love their schools. They’re very supportive and they expect a lot out of you and a lot out of our kids. I really don’t have discipline issues,” he said.

But what he does have are problems in recruiting and retaining teachers.

“We have a teacher pathway, trying to train our own to get them back in our area. I have two math positions open and no applicants. It’s tough out here. I offer them housing and other incentives. In a month school opens and I don’t have a math teacher,” he said.

Zehr starts his day in Copeland and by noon is on the road to Montezuma. Last year, he drove the school bus 81 times to pick up kids because in a small operation that’s what you do.

Zehr has been superintendent of both districts for eight years and said it was the best move he could have made. “I know every kid in this school. I love it,” he said.

~Scott Rothschild, srothschild@kasb.org
friends, I’m not going to “fix those Kansas schools” or “knock some sense into the Legislature” or “set Kansas straight already”.

Yet, in classic Bumpo fashion, he got it half right.

KASB, and more specifically our members, can do all those things. Part of our mission is to be the voice of public education in Kansas and KASB is sending a clear, compelling and authoritative message to school supporters statewide.

Education is a top priority for Kansans and we are seeing this in engaged school boards, the grassroots support groups popping up across the state, a record number of candidates filing for House and Senate seats, and the recent near-unanimous passage of a school funding bill to keep schools open.

As president, I will have the distinct privilege of being one of those voices for KASB, and I intend to use it to help you. A lot of work is ahead this year with a new funding formula to be hashed out, a new accreditation model in the works, and a host of new faces coming to the Kansas Legislature. All our voices will be critical to the success of our schools and our students, and I’m looking forward to working with each of you as we “set Kansas straight already.”

Now, if you run across my Dad and he tells you about the great work I’m doing for Kansas, just smile and nod your head. Then you know what to do.

KASB Partner Fair provides options for district operations

John Heim, KASB executive director, set the tone for the day in his welcome to those attending the first-ever KASB Efficiency and District Operations Partner Fair Thursday in Topeka.

“Our goal for the day is helping you find the right tools to do the job,” he said.

Representatives from KASB Prestigious Partners P1 Group, K12itc, Piper Jaffray and Opaa! offered background information and insight to better equip district leaders to make recommendations and decisions about all phases of district operations. They also gave overviews of their services in the areas of facilities and operations, technology and food service management.

All Things Facilities

“The deferred maintenance list is a problem plaguing our schools,” said Dana Dunn, P1 Group Inc. business development executive. Dunn represents the Lenexa-based company that describes itself as an “all things facilities” company. P1 Group Inc. partners with the local district in a discovery process to access facility needs. The company focuses on determining facility needs through community-based activities and then helps the district communicate why changes are needed and how districts can realize significant savings.

“Our goal is to help you solve the problem,” Dunn said. Among the many solutions provided by the company are customized deferred maintenance plans, facility assessments, investment grade audits and facility master plans.

We want your nerdy work

K12itc is a Kansas City-based technology management company that provides a wide range of options to school districts for improving technology support and a lower cost.

Dennis Fisher, K12itc vice president of business development, outlined a number of technology-related topics district leaders need to consider, including cyber security, data storage and backup and maintaining an efficient and reliable technology infrastructure.

“We focus on technology so you can focus on instruction,” Fisher said. The company can scale technology support to fit the local needs, often not only saving money but improving how technology supports staff and students.

The initial assessment will reveal the technology “pain points,” he said, and then work with the local district and staff to find the best solutions.

Joining Fisher for the presentation was Jake Naper, K12itc account manager. Both responded to numerous questions about technology management and overcoming resistance when transitioning to a new technology support model for a local school district.

Students who eat better, do better

A growing number of Kansas school districts work with Opaa! to manage their school food service program. The company also operates in Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Arkansas.

“We tailor to what the needs and desires of the districts are,” said Steve Adams, business development from Opaa! Adams served as a myth buster during his presentation, debunking many of the rumors that surround changing from a self-operated food service program to a specialized management company.

“Operationally, it will look and feel the same with no additional investment,” he said. “The district sets its own meal prices, controls the revenue streams and retains control of equipment and facilities. And even if we end up hiring staff as Opaa! Food Management employees, we won’t hire anyone without your specific approval.”

The question of quality often comes up when talking about school food service. “We are able to buy high quality food at a lower rate and pass on the savings to our customers,” Abrams said. The company is involved in many farm to school programs, and looks to locally-sourced suppliers whenever possible.

In many cases, Adams said the quality of food improves and the number of choices also expands. The company works with registered dietitians to develop recipes that are popular with kids and meet all Federal and State regulations.

From window replacement to building a new facility

Dustin Avey, a managing director for Piper Jaffray’s Kansas City public finance team, reviewed the advantages and options available in financing long-term capital improvements.

“The list just gets longer and more expensive,” he said, specifically referring to deferred maintenance projects. “Eventually, it outstrips the district’s capital outlay capacity.”

This is often the starting point for districts to talk about bond financing to pay for aging facilities, technology and other
significant improvements, Avey said. He outlined what can be financed, what general costs are associated with projects of this kind and what the process is for developing a bond campaign and passing a bond issue.

Avey noted moving projects such as roofs, technology and even HVAC upgrades to a special project financed through a bond issue makes good fiscal sense by relieving the pressure on the yearly capital outlay budget.

KASB shares expertise on Risk Management, bid laws, advocacy

Presenters for the day also included KASB staff, Rod Spangler, assistant executive director for risk management, said KASB is each member’s risk management partner.

“We want to change the way you think about risk,” he said. Spangler discussed the differences between an insurance broker and consultant and urged school leaders to carefully scrutinize the bids and service contracts they receive.

While KASB understands the desire to use local vendors, there are often significant savings that can be found elsewhere.

“We will help you identify best in class solutions in insurance and serve as your resource when navigating all matters relating to risk management,” Spangler said.

Lori Church, KASB attorney, reviewed Kansas bid laws and purchasing practices for the group. Church said it often makes sense to investigate purchasing options even when the law doesn’t require it.

“Just because you don’t bid, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t bid,” Church said. “You may get a more competitive price if you do bid the service,” she said.

The presentations were rounded out by Leah Fliter, KASB advocacy and outreach specialist, and Rob Gilligan, KASB governmental relations specialist. They reviewed various advocacy initiatives sponsored by the Association and highlighted election information available on the KASB website. ~Carol Pitts, cpitts@kasb.org

**Federal government news**

The House Appropriations Committee has approved its Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, which would prioritize investments for Title I programs and special education grants to school districts and states under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Under the measure, approximately $2 billion is proposed for increases in Title I, IDEA, and new Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). However, the proposed bill also reduces funding for state assessment aid, innovation and improvement grants and safe schools and citizenship grants.

Under the bill, IDEA grants to school districts and states would be funded at $13.4 billion—an increase of $500 million over the current Fiscal Year 2016 enacted level. School districts provide special education services to approximately 6.6 million students under IDEA. Currently, the national average for the federal share of funding to each student under IDEA is approximately $1,777 (a national average of about 16 percent).

The bill would increase Title I grants for disadvantaged students to $15.35 billion to support student achievement efforts, which is $500 million more than current funding, and would also exceed the authorized funding level for Title I grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is $15 billion for FY17.

Kansas currently received an estimated $118 million in Title I aid and $110 million in special education IDEA grants. These are the largest federal aid programs after the school food service aid, which provides about $200 million. All federal aid to school districts totals about $500 million, or approximately 8.3 percent of Kansas school district expenditures.

The funding bill includes a number of policy provisions. It would prohibit the U.S. Department of Education from moving forward with regulations to place new requirements on teacher preparation, and block the U.S. Department of Labor’s overtime rule.

The bill would also prohibit the Department of Education using any funding to enforce alleged violations under its transgender guidance “until such violations have been generally recognized by appropriate courts of the United States in final and unappealable judgments (including the exhaustion of or expiration of the time for any appeals), and such alleged violations have been determined by the applicable court to have occurred.”

A new program created under ESSA for Student Support and Academic Achievement grants would be funded at $1 billion to provide flexible funds to districts for purposes of expanding access to a well-rounded education, improving school conditions and increasing access to technology. In addition to the measure’s targeted increases, the bill would provide an additional $23 million to the Impact Aid program that provides flexible support to local school districts impacted by the presence of federally-owned land and activities, such as military bases.

**U.S. Department of Education releases assessment regulations**

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) last week issued two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to implement Title I, Parts A and B of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which relates to academic assessments. KASB is studying the new rules, which are open for public comments.

The notice includes proposed assessment regulations developed through the negotiated rulemaking process conducted earlier this year. The proposed regulations also include provisions relating to ESSA’s innovative assessment demonstration authority, more commonly known as the “innovative assessment pilot program.”

**House Education CTE bill**

The U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee has unanimously approved HR 5587, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which passed with a vote of 37 to 0.

The bill would reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (CTE). HR 5587 modernizes and reforms CTE to help more Americans enter the workforce with the skills they need to compete for high-skilled, in-demand jobs.

HR 5587 addresses the concerns education advocates and business leaders have expressed in regard to the importance of aligning career and technical education programs with current and future workforce demands to help prepare students for both college and careers. ~Mark Tallman, mtallman@kasb.org
Upcoming Workshops

*Board Leadership Aug 2 Hays
Principal Evaluation Aug 3 Topeka
*Board Leadership Aug 4 Topeka
*Superintendent Evaluation Aug 23 Topeka
Balanced Leadership Session 1 Aug 30 Topeka
Balanced Leadership Session 1 Aug 31 Salina
Balanced Leadership Session 1 Sept 1 Fredonia
*Superintendent Evaluation Sept 8 Oakley
*Becoming an Effective Supervisor Sept 20 Hays
*Becoming an Effective Supervisor Sept 22 Topeka
*Fall Summits, Various Dates/Locations

2016 Convention Call for Presentations now open

The Kansas Association of School Boards is seeking proposals for breakout sessions for the KASB 99th Annual Conference. The 45-minute breakout sessions will be scheduled for Sat., Dec. 3, 2016 in Wichita, Kansas. Any KASB member organization can submit a proposal.

Annual Conference is the association’s flagship event—an intensive learning and networking experience bringing together hundreds of board of education members, school district leaders and content experts. Presenting at KASB’s Annual Conference is the ideal way to share your district’s story while focusing on best practices, effective strategies and helping fellow educators deepen their understanding of emerging issues in education.

Additional details regarding the five strands can be found in the next column or the Call for Presentations form available online at www.kasb.org/CFP. The deadline for submitting a proposal is August 19, 2016.