

MINUTES

2010 COMMISSION

December 13, 2005
Room 241-N—Statehouse

Members Present

Rochelle Chronister, Chairperson
Carolyn Campbell
Barbara Hinton
Stephen Iliff
Dennis Jones
Barbara Mackey
Representative Sue Storm

Members Absent

Dr. Ray Daniels, Vice Chairperson
David Davies
Representative Kathe Decker
Senator Jean Kurtis Schodorf

Staff Present

Art Griggs, Revisor of Statutes Office
Kathie Sparks, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Morning Session

The meeting of the 2010 Commission was called to order by Chairperson Rochelle Chronister at 10:00 a.m. on December 13, 2005, in Room 241-N, Statehouse. Chairperson Chronister called the Commission's attention to the preliminary minutes of the November meeting.

Carolyn Campbell moved to approve the minutes of the November 14-15, 2005, meeting of the 2010 Commission, seconded by Representative Storm. The motion carried.

Chairperson Chronister opened a discussion on topics for future meetings by informing the Commission that she and Dr. Daniels were invited to attend the November meeting of the Council

of Superintendents held at the State Board of Education. At the meeting, she requested that the superintendents send her an e-mail recommending one or two policies which, as administrators, they felt would be the most positive things that could be done for schools. She asked that the superintendents also request suggestions from their teachers. To date, she had received 15 responses. She noted that one e-mail suggested a roundtable discussion concerning possible improvements for schools both among Commission members and among the Commission and persons brought in as “thinkers outside the box.”

She went on to say that she received interesting e-mails from two superintendents who had unique suggestions for school consolidation. One superintendent suggested educational consolidation rather than the usual consolidation which would include the athletic teams overseen by the Kansas State High School Activities Association. The superintendent explained that his district was involved in a consolidation process which was not going very well, not because the parents and the townspeople did not want a bigger school with more academic opportunities for the students, but because, due to the athletic competition between the schools, neither community wanted to be absorbed by the other. The superintendent’s solution was to consolidate on an educational basis, and then, if it was the desire of the voters, allow the recreation commission of each community to be in charge of a mill levy to keep their athletic teams. The other superintendent recommended what he called “reverse consolidation.” The superintendent, who was from western Kansas, explained that the dominate town in his area has been rapidly growing, and new school buildings were needed to accommodate the increase in students. However, the population in the six or seven surrounding small school districts has been steadily decreasing, and those districts are having difficulty surviving. He noted that the small districts have ample physical space and suggested that students from the dominant town be transported to the smaller schools on a voluntary basis. He reasoned that students in the small schools would have an opportunity to participate in many more activities, the small districts would be able to keep their headcount up, and there would be no need to construct new buildings. In his opinion, many parents would prefer that their children be in a small school district.

Chairperson Chronister further reported that many of the superintendents supported funding for all-day kindergarten, and some of them mentioned the importance of distance learning as far as providing educational opportunities to smaller and more isolated school districts. She went on to say that another issue the Commission might consider addressing was the increased cost of health insurance and property insurance for school districts.

Dennis Jones reminded members that he commented at the November meeting that the children of many families in western Kansas school districts must spend a great length of time on the school bus and that one family’s children in his school district must spend one hour and ten minutes on the bus one way. He noted that most of the western Kansas counties, such as Scott, Greeley, Wichita, Hamilton, and Stanton, have one school district per county; therefore, consolidation is not a possibility. He explained that, after the November meeting, he asked the superintendent of the western Kansas school district in which he lives to provide a list of the longest one-way school bus commutes for several schools in the area (Attachment 1). He noted that most of the commutes listed were at least one hour. He pointed out that Southwestern Heights, which is in the school district between Liberal and Lakin, has a family whose children are on the bus 120 minutes one way. He emphasized that transportation distances for children in western Kansas are significantly different from most other areas in the state. For example, two school districts in Kearny County cover almost 850 square miles. He went on to say that interactive television has been offered by the school district in his area for seven or eight years. He explained that a paraprofessional is present in the classroom to monitor students who participate in interactive television courses. He noted that the district has

had tremendous difficulty in getting teachers for chemistry, physics, and upper division math courses. Currently, the school districts are using a “shared teacher” program, wherein a teacher spends three hours teaching classes in one district and then travels 30 to 45 minutes to an adjoining district to teach classes. Chairperson Chronister requested that Mr. Jones ask superintendents in his area for suggestions as to what could be done to improve the students’ transportation and educational experience.

For the Commission’s information, Kathie Sparks, Kansas Legislative Research Department, noted that Lawrence has a virtual school which is offered to students at home through the Internet. She explained that a parent or other responsible person must be with the student, and the student is required to take tests. A brief discussion concerning the virtual school process followed.

Chairperson Chronister commented, “As long as I am chair, there will be two main things that I will ask for – keep an open mind and ask for the statistics and the data. Don’t tell me that charter schools are better than public schools unless you have the actual data to show that that’s true, comparable data. That’s the only way that we’re going to be able to offer the Legislature any help. They gave this Commission a long time. They gave us five years. I think that this Commission has got to start looking for ideas that are true solutions and backed up with data.”

Steve Illiff commented that the website for the Kansas State Department of Education includes data on how school funds are being spent at the district level. He noted that the data does not compare “apples to apples” because the coding differs from district to district. He suggested that perhaps the Commission should recommend the implementation of a formal accounting system to be used by districts statewide so that accurate comparisons can be made.

In response to Mr. Illiff’s suggestion, Representative Storm commented, “You may have a wonderful idea. But I think that, in this technological age, a lot of times people have data just because we can. And I think that we need to be sure that anything we collect is going to have a real purpose, and we’re going to act on it.” Carolyn Campbell added, “My thought is, the achievement of our children is what we really need to focus on as opposed to where the money is. I guess it’s fine for us to review how this accounting is done and to have something consistent, but my personal focus is on trying to make sure we have programs to educate our children so that they can achieve.”

Barbara Hinton commented that everyone cares about what outcomes students achieve, but in order to understand why students achieve without funds or do not achieve without funds, uniform data is needed when determining how the money is actually being spent on education so, ultimately, the two play together. Chairperson Chronister observed, “I think one of the things that we don’t want to do is to get school districts so overburdened with trying to watch where the pennies are going that, as Carolyn says, they forget about what the big picture looks like, which is educating the kids.” In response, Mr. Illiff noted, “A business has a department that takes care of the accounting. That’s very critical. Then you have a department that takes care of the customers, and that’s very important. I don’t think that having good accounting records will distract us from the overall mission to give the best education to every child in Kansas.”

Barbara Mackey noted that all Wichita elementary, middle, and secondary schools use the same accounting system. However, central administration has its own accounting system. She commented, “Central administration has hidden money. They always have hidden money.” Chairperson Chronister added, “I think one of the things we have to be careful of is that we do not add a burden to the administrators, but we do need to be able to figure out how we get the information and it’s correct.”

Ms. Mackey requested more information on the voucher system, charter schools, home schools, and private schools. Chairperson Chronister responded, "I think that's absolutely a necessity if we're going to talk about this in any kind of logical manner, and there are people who don't even want to talk about it; I understand that. But let's talk about what are the facts. If the facts show that something works better, then maybe we ought to look at it. If the facts show that some of the things are disastrous, and they are, let's quit talking about it. And we're not just talking about Kansas with some of them. Arizona has had a lot of charter schools, and Arizona had a lot of embezzlement. I think that Missouri has had some of the same problems. Let's find out what the facts actually show. Those are the kinds of issues that Barb (Hinton) can put her team to work on." Barbara Hinton noted that the Post Audit team could identify whether there are comparable outcomes for nontraditional school settings.

Mr. Jones stated that the most significant problem with the 1992 school finance formula is that it allows the exemption of the 20 mill property tax from school finance for certain property. He contended that the 20 mills should not be allowed as a exemption.

Barbara Hinton distributed copies of a memorandum regarding background topics for the audit team which was prepared by Scott Frank, Manager of the Legislative Post Audit school audit team ([Attachment 2](#)). She noted that, as indicated in the memorandum, the 2010 Commission may not be ready to decide on audit topics at the conclusion of the Post Audit cost study scheduled to be released on January 4, 2006. She discussed the suggested background audits listed in the memorandum. She pointed out that, in addition to providing useful information to the Commission, the background audits would provide the audit team with a valuable foundation for future audit work, as directed by the Commission. Representative Storm requested that voucher programs be added under the topic, "Non-Traditional School Settings." It was the consensus of the Commission that the Post Audit school audit team should proceed with the suggested background audits. Chairperson Chronister confirmed that the audit team would find available background information without visiting school districts.

It was the consensus of the Commission that Chairperson Chronister ask Representative John Edmonds and the Post Audit Committee to suggest topics to be included in the 2010 Commission's audit requests.

The February 2006 meeting of the 2010 Commission was tentatively scheduled for February 27, 2006.

Afternoon Session

Joint Meeting with the Legislative Educational Planning Committee

For the afternoon portion of the meeting on December 13, the Committee joined the members of the Legislative Educational Planning Committee for the purpose of hearing items of mutual interest.

Report from Standard and Poor's

Michael Steward, Jason Kingston, and Paul Gazzerro, members of the Performance Evaluation Services section of Standard and Poor's, met with the Committee to review the report on School District Efficiency (Attachment 3). Standard and Poor's has been engaged by Governor Sebelius to conduct a study of Kansas school districts to identify those districts that are most resource effective. The study, conducted in 2005, includes an analysis of how resource-effective districts make the best use of their money and will be used to establish a baseline to measure resource effectiveness for districts across the state.

In the spring of 2005, the State Department of Education and school districts provided Standard and Poor's with academic, financial, and demographic data on each district. The data were analyzed and 16 "highly resource-effective" school districts were identified, based on data profiles developed by Standard and Poor's. From the 16 districts, four were selected for site visits and further study. Those districts currently are reviewing case studies that have been developed for them and a report on the four districts will be made public shortly. A final report will be issued in January of 2006 and will include baselines which can be used to measure the effectiveness of all districts in the state.

The four districts which are being studied in depth are USD 470 (Arkansas City), USD 475 (Geary County Schools), USD 233 (Olathe), and USD 466 (Scott County). These districts have two things in common: They perform better on state reading and mathematics tests than most other districts with similar enrollments of economically disadvantaged students, and their spending is more cost-effective than most other demographically similar school districts.

The researchers told the Committee that they observed in each of the four districts a high commitment to student achievement, evidenced by the fact that goals are clearly articulated, staff is informed and focused, strategies are developed and clearly articulated, and resources are directed toward identified goals. Staff development plays an important role in most cases in ensuring that the staff is well-trained and engaged in the process. Researchers commented on the fact that they observed situations in which "everybody is in charge of quality" and that administrators generally are familiar with current research on school improvement.

The study will conclude with the development of benchmarks and the identification of best practices that can be applied statewide.

Report on the Six No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools

The United States Secretary of Education annually honors public and private elementary and secondary schools that are either academically superior in their states or have demonstrated dramatic gains in student achievement. To qualify, a school must be one of the following:

- A "dramatically improving" school that has at least 40 percent of its students from disadvantaged backgrounds and has dramatically improved student performance in accordance with state assessment systems; or
- A "high performing school" that is in the top 10 percent on state assessment scores in both reading and mathematics.

The six Kansas No Child Left Behind Schools for 2005 are Roosevelt Elementary School, USD 418 (McPherson); IXL Elementary School, USD 470 (Arkansas City); Ware Elementary School, USD 475 (Geary County); White Church Elementary School, USD 500 (Kansas City); Baxter Springs High School, USD 508 (Baxter Springs); and the Independent School, an accredited private elementary school in Wichita.

Pam Klenda, Principal of Roosevelt Elementary School in McPherson, told the Committee that her school emphasizes making parents feel welcome in the building; close connections with parents; a genuine commitment to academics, particularly reading, writing, and mathematics; preparation for assessments; and motivation. Ms. Klenda said the culture in the school is for students to do their best.

Deb Gustafson, Principal of Ware Elementary School in Geary County, told the Committee that her school spends a lot of federal grant money on professional development. She said that at-risk students get special help in the form of "pre-teaching" in order to help them be ready to learn. Each at-risk student is visited once a week in the summer by a teacher who spends a few minutes reading to the student and then leaves a book. Parental involvement is high, as evidenced by conferences which are attended by 97 percent of the parents.

Mark Whitemer, Principal, IXL Elementary School in Arkansas City, told the Committee that his school promotes family involvement and has "interventions" in the areas of reading, writing, and math for students who need additional help. He stressed the importance of professional development for his staff.

Jamie Carlisle, Principal of Baxter Springs High School in Baxter Springs, said the key to motivating high school students is time: time is a management tool which can be given to students or taken away, in the form of extra classes for students who score unsatisfactorily on student assessments. For exemplary students, there is the opportunity to exit early from programs.

Based on testimony before the Committee, several common characteristics of the Blue Ribbon schools are a high level of personal involvement between school staff and students and their parents and strong support for teachers in the form of mentoring and professional development. Several representatives of Blue Ribbon schools told the Committee that, in order to create a better environment in their school, they had to get rid of teachers who were unqualified or unmotivated.

The meeting was adjourned.

Prepared by Shirley Higgins
Edited by Kathie Sparks

Approved by the Commission on:

January 27, 2006

(date)