

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on March 9, 2005, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Carolyn Rampey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Kathie Sparks, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Gary Brunk, Kansas Action for Children
Jim Edwards, Kansas Association of School Boards
Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association
Senator Jim Barnett

SB 277—School districts; number of preschool-aged-at-risk pupils increased to 6,000

Carolyn Rampey, Legislative Research Department, explained that the bill pertains to the section of the School Finance Act concerning definitions of who will be counted for purposes of school district budgets. The change is on line 31, page 2 of the bill. It has to do with preschool-aged-at-risk pupils, who are four-year-old children who are at-risk and are eligible for school district programs. Under the School Finance Act, these children get counted as half a student. The language on line 31 deals with a cap on the number of children who can be counted for purposes of reimbursement. The bill would raise the cap from 5,500 to 6,000 students. In order to be eligible for the program, the same guidelines are used as for the Head Start program. The purpose of raising the cap to 6,000, is to insure that all the four-year-old children who meet the Head Start guidelines would be served either in Head Start or in school district programs. Ms. Rampey noted that the fiscal note was \$1.0 million, and the current program is between \$11.5 million and \$12.0 million. She explained that the bill was initiated because the Governor recommended the increase and included in her budget \$1,004,045 from the Children's Initiatives Fund to expand this program. The Senate subcommittee on the Department of Education budget concurred with the Governor's recommendation and recommended the bill.

Senator Vratil asked what would happen if the cap was reached. Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education, said that the process is on a first come, first serve basis. He noted, "It has not been a big problem to date. A program like this does not grow rapidly overnight. It grows slowly over time. It's a very effective program. Kindergarten teachers will tell you it's the greatest thing since sliced bread because it's helping children to prepare. In most cases, we've been able to cover the requests. It's just in the last year we've really reached our peak. We believe there are another 500 across the state that could utilize this service, and it would be immensely helpful in the long run."

Gary Brunk, Kansas Action for Children, testified in support of **SB 277**. He noted that, in order to close the achievement gap, the pre-school preparation gap needs to be closed. By increasing the current cap on enrollment in the four-year-old-at-risk program, the bill would make a small but important step towards that end. He reported that national studies show that over 40% of children enter kindergarten not fully prepared for school. Unfortunately, this gap carries on to higher grades. However, two decades of research show important positive outcomes for children who attend good quality pre-kindergarten programs. He noted that good quality pre-kindergarten results in proven savings to school districts because of reductions in the need for special and remedial education and grade retention. In conclusion, he emphasized the need to make a greater effort to increase the quality of the four-year-old-at-risk program through more ongoing training for teachers and a formal evaluation of the program. (Attachment 1)

Jim Edwards, Kansas Association of School Boards, testified in support of **SB 277** because it recognizes the need for early education opportunities for pre-school-at-risk students. However, he suggested that the cap be eliminated by striking lines 31 and 32 on page one. He noted that it would be disturbing if there were children not served due to an arbitrary number. (Attachment 2)

Mark Desetti, Kansas National Education Association (KNEA), testified in support of **SB 277**. He noted that

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this intervention program is intended to address the achievement gap as early as possible, and KNEA fully supports efforts to fund this very valuable program . (Attachment 3)

There being no others wishing to testify, the hearing on SB 277 was closed.

Senator Vratil moved to recommend SB 277 favorably for passage, seconded by Senator Lee. The motion carried.

Senator Schodorf opened committee discussion on a previously heard bill, SB 44 concerning the teacher service scholarship program. Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes Office, distributed copies of a balloon of the bill and discussed the amendments shown. (Attachment 4) She pointed out that a new amendment beginning on line 9, page 2, strikes the preference given to math and science teachers. With regard to the amendment on page 2, line 27, changing “certification” to “licensure,” Senator Vratil noted that the change would also be necessary in other locations such as on line 7, page 2, and on line 20, page 1.

Senator Barnett explained that the language on lines 9 through 12 on page 2 was stricken to address a concern expressed at the hearing that the bill would exclude other teachers. Senator Schodorf pointed out that “hard-to-fill teaching discipline” is defined on page one as a teaching discipline in which there is a critical shortage of teachers as determined and specified by the State Board of Education and the teaching disciplines of math and science for any of the grades five through twelve.

Senator Teichman moved to amend SB 44 as suggested, seconded by Senator Apple. The motion carried.

Senator Teichman moved to recommend SB 44 favorably for passage as amended, seconded by Senator Vratil. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 10, 2005.