

Vision 2020 Committee hears about teacher preparation and licensure

K-State Education Dean Debbie Mercer presented an overview of the higher education teacher certification program, outlining three blocks in the process. She also addressed teacher retention costs and the impact on students, the need for effective teachers in high need areas, as well as geographical needs. She finished her presentation by asserting that "Investments in education at every level pay off."

Rep Kiegerl (R-Olathe) opened the question session with a question regarding teacher retention - "Where and why are we losing good teachers?"

Commissioner DeBacker noted that the State Department annual provides data on those issues. Kiegerl went on to assert that Albert Einstein would not be able to receive a license in Kansas. Debbie Mercer responded with a sound explanation of the need for pedagogy and teacher methodology. "Emphasizing content knowledge," she said, "does not mean you know how to help students learn what you are knowledgeable about." Rep Carolyn Bridges (D-Wichita) made this point as well stating, "There is a need for pedagogy, not just anyone can teach."

Dr. Myers opened his presentation with KSDE's mission is to provide the best and the brightest in the classroom licensure options: he then reviewed the Kansas Educator License Options including a detailed explanation of the process for determining how to become licensed in the state Kansas. Dr. Meyers explained KSDE's license review process including an explanation of why we have a Licensure Review Committee and the important role they play in determining who receives a license.

The session ended by reviewing three licensure issues currently being considered: a Career and Technical Education Pathway Permit, allowing special education as the initial teacher preparation program (direct entry) rather than through a masters, and for out-of-state alternative route applicant including acceptance of set amount of successful experience in lieu of Licensure Review Committee.

Testimony in the Pensions Committee

The House Pension Committee heard testimony on HB 2533. This bill is a proposed plan design change for Tier 3, changing future benefits. Tier 3 will be composed of workers who are hired after January 1, 2015. Keeping the Kansas Promise Coalition, including KNEA, testified as neutral until the impact of the proposed changes can be quantified. KKP testimony emphasized that KPERS and the Legislature must "stay the course" and make no changes to the Tier 3 benefits until the fiscal impact of the new tier can be determined through experience.

Representative Barker introduced a bill that would hold harmless the pensions of state employees if they are furloughed for a certain number of work days in the future. In the past year a number of state employee groups were furloughed for a number of days due to budget cuts. The proposed bill would keep the KPERS benefits of those employees whole meaning that the employees and the state would continue to pay into KPERS at the regular rate and their benefits would not diminish due to furloughs.

On a positive note, KPERS funds earned a 17% rate of return on investments during the year of 2013 which is significantly above the assumed rate of return of 8%.

Weather shuts down the legislature and just about everything else!

The snow storm in progress as we write has caused the normally unthinkable to happen! With 10 to 12 inches of snow predicted, state government offices in Shawnee County along with the schools announced yesterday afternoon that they would be closed today. Shortly after that announcement, leadership in the House and Senate both announced that the legislature too would take the day off. The last legislative snow day was Feb. 21, 2013.

No word yet on Wednesday - we'll know when the full impact of today's storm is upon us!

