

Two days of data and discussion

Following our two snow days, the joint House and Senate Education Committees met to gather more data and discuss issues of interest.

On Thursday they heard from Kansas Commissioner of education Diane DeBacker and anti-government gadfly Dave Trabert from the Kansas Policy Institute. Both were there to discuss performance on the National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP).

DeBacker reviewed the data including performance results after the cuts in recent years to base state aid. Kansas has just begun to see results dip after years of cuts.

Trabert continued his mantra that Kansas is not particularly good and that restoring those cuts won't make a difference. Trabert continues to say the issue is not how much money you spend (even after years of cuts have taken school funding down to the 1992 level when adjusted for inflation) but how you spend it. To a certain extent Trabert is right - money needs to be spent on supporting teaching and instructional support. What he ignores is that paying teachers (including their salaries, health benefits, and KPERS retirement benefits) is part of that. You don't recruit and retain the best teachers with low salaries, meager benefits, and a compromised retirement system.

Beyond that you can't spend the money for heating and air conditioning or the electric bill on textbooks and supplies. Schools need principals, nurses, paraprofessionals, custodians, secretaries, and other personnel to support classroom teaching and students. And yes, we can spend more on personnel but then Trabert and the KPI will blast schools for "hiring surges." No, one can't win with Trabert because the primary aim of KPI is shrinking government services to a size that can be drowned in a bathtub.

Today, the committees heard about how low performing schools are identified using state assessment results. It was a long and complex presentation on the mathematical calculation of the Assessment Performance Index (API) for each

school and the setting of an Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) for "gap schools."

It seems like ages since we watched committee members nod with appreciation when Dr. John Poggio of the KU Center for Educational Testing told them that student performance on state assessments was not predictive of post-secondary success and that state assessments could not be used for high stakes purposes.

There was a little bit of drama at the end of today's meeting when Rep. Ed Trimmer (D-Winfield) asked chair Kasha Kelley (R-Arkansas City) to allow time on the agenda for the presentation of information refuting Dave Trabert's claims about school funding. Kelley essentially told him there was no time available. Trimmer said the issue could be discussed in Committee or in the press but it would be discussed. We understand that after private discussions Kelley and Trimmer came to an agreement and the matter would be taken up with the full committee.

KNEA supports "Erin's Law"

KNEA testified in support of "Erin's Law," a bill calling for training of teachers and students in identifying and reporting child sexual abuse. The law is named for Erin Merryn, a victim of child sexual abuse who has written books about her experience. Merryn appeared before the House Judiciary Committee to support the bill personally.

The bill was brought forward by Rep. Russ Jennings (R-Dodge City). Proponents included Jennings, Merryn, Kelly Robbins, a child advocacy center executive director from western Kansas, Lacey Tucker, a victim of abuse, and KNEA Executive Director Claudette Johns.

KNEA asked the committee to broaden the bill so that all school personnel would be trained in identifying the signs of and reporting child sexual abuse. Most school districts are already doing some of this training. The bill would provide for some standardization of training across the state.

The Kansas Association of School Boards testified as neutral on the bill suggesting that school boards were already handling this and that it represented an unfunded mandate. Some members of the committee wondered why they

were not supporting a bill calling upon them to do what they say they are already doing.

For more information about Erin Merryn and Erin's Law, visit www.erinmerryn.net ^[1].

1. [http://click.email.nea.org/?](http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=e5f93f4da4da931d21e7dbdef18ddf88c5fba901b688b1bc6b808b90913b390c6ffe54bd2c34c01a)

[qs=e5f93f4da4da931d21e7dbdef18ddf88c5fba901b688b1bc6b808b90913b390c6ffe54bd2c34c01a](http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=e5f93f4da4da931d21e7dbdef18ddf88c5fba901b688b1bc6b808b90913b390c6ffe54bd2c34c01a)