

Joint House/Senate Education Committee meeting hears from superintendents on at-risk

The Education Committees met jointly today to hear a "superintendents at-risk roundtable" session.

Superintendents speaking to the committees were Cynthia Lane, Kansas City, Kansas; John Allison, Wichita; Rick Atha, Garden City; Julie Ford, Topeka; Marlin Berry, Olathe; and Gene Hinson, Shawnee Mission.

All the superintendents were given the opportunity to review the demographics of their districts and the kinds interventions for at-risk students their districts were undertaking. All of them did an excellent job discussing issues of English language learners, poverty, and the challenges of increasing and pervasive poverty.

The Committee was left with much food for thought.

Fireworks!

The Senate Ways and Means Education Budget Subcommittee met this afternoon to approve their recommendations to the full committee on higher education.

For the most part they approved the Governor's budget with a few changes.

the change that got the most discussion and caused fireworks in the meeting was a cut of \$2 million from the University of Kansas Translational Chemical Biology program. All of the money was moved to the Kansas Comprehensive Grant Program - student scholarships - with the proviso that 75% of the money go to scholarships for students in private colleges and 25% for public college students.

Senator Laura Kelly (D-Topeka) asked why there was a change to require 75% of the money go to private college students. Currently 50% is for private schools; 50% for public. Chairman Arpke (R-Salina) told her that this was because private colleges tend to graduate their students in four years.

Kelly said that this was because many students in public universities are working to pay their tuition bills and are dependent on the scholarships. Arpke responded that the public colleges need to give students a syllabus showing how they can graduate in four years even if they work.

Kelly then asked why the \$2 million was taken only from KU and not spread across the Regents universities. Arpke responded by saying that was the decision they made. Kelly protested that that response did not answer her question and Arpke then told her that KU student enrollment was down and that they didn't need the money for "professors, beds, and electricity." He also said the \$2 million cut was just rightsizing the KU budget.

Kelly was not letting that go. She said his response and the decision looked more like a "personal vendetta." There has been much posturing by some extreme conservative legislators that KU would suffer if they did not fire Professor Guth who sent out a tweet highly critical of the National Rifle Association last year. Guth was not fired and now there is a program eliminated at the cost of \$2 million at KU. Arpke asserted that the decision was not any kind of vendetta.

The budget recommendations were adopted with Kelly voting no.

The committee also voted to pull the K-12 budget back to the subcommittee in light of last week's Supreme Court decision.