

All-Day K Committee hears from practitioners

Last week's meeting of the House Special Committee on All-Day Kindergarten was focused on presentations by Dr. Donald Fast (Lexia reading program), former kindergarten teacher Roxie Peterson, and Dr. Eva Horn from the KU School of Education. Each presenter shared research touting the benefits of all-day kindergarten while also sharing some insight on the reality of modern early childhood instruction.

While Dr. Fast's presentation was data heavy, it was mostly an infomercial on the benefits of the Lexia reading program. More compelling was the honest and sincere tone offered by retired kindergarten teacher Roxie Peterson. In her opening, Mrs. Peterson asked the committee members to indicate if they had experienced kindergarten as a child. Few raised their hands and she responded, "Just think where you could be if you had attended kindergarten." Mrs. Peterson shared anecdotes from her classroom experience, which were summarized by a few key points:

- Kindergarten students achieve best when they learn cooperatively and benefit from role models provided by older students.
- All-day kindergarten gives teachers the time and scope to provide deeper instruction while better connecting with students to learn individual needs.
- Highly qualified teachers who are well-supported have the deepest positive impact on student achievement in kindergarten.

Dr. Eva Horn, presented data and research relating to achievement over longitudinal studies that show the long-term value of quality early childhood programs. She referenced that some studies show a "regression to the mean" in 2nd and 3rd grade, but explained that there were a variety of developmental reasons and that over longer-term studies, high achievement correlated with kindergarten and early childhood learning programs well. Both at the beginning of her presentation and at the end, Dr. Horn reiterated the need for support from special services like literacy coaches and special education teachers, while also recognizing the key impact of highly qualified and well trained classroom teachers.

Following the presentations, questions from the committee immediately focused on testing and economics. Representative Winn commented that her own early childhood experiences gave her the social skills necessary to work cooperatively with difficult

people. She also commented on the value of training teachers to deal with issues related to cultural diversity and early literacy.

While the presenters were focused on pedagogy and positive impacts of well-supported classroom instruction, the majority of the committee members seemed not to fully grasp the real educational language. One committee member asked about how best to deal with students who didn't need kindergarten at all and his concern for their levels of boredom. Dr. Horn addressed the engagement issue and related the myriad ways modern educators promote student engagement.

Chairman Jerry Lunn closed the hearing with comments about Obama's federal budget and the additional strain it's educational mandates would cause Kansas. He commented directly to Dr. Horn that although the early childhood programs she referenced in her presentation showed great promise, he had serious concerns over how they would be funded, particularly in light of the recent ruling by the Kansas Supreme Court.

This might be school finance week

We were buoyed today when we saw that the Senate Ways and Means Education Subcommittee had suddenly posted a meeting for this morning to discuss K-12 recommendations.

The meeting took just a few minutes and consisted of adopting a statement from Senator Arpke (R-Salina) saying that they acknowledged that the Gannon decision had been released and that they would consider its ramifications in their decision making. The meeting was quickly adjourned with no announcement of what they might do next.

The House Appropriations Committee meanwhile will devote all of the meeting time from Tuesday through Friday for consideration of K-12 school finance.

They plan a review of the Gannon decision on Tuesday, a review of the current school finance formula on Wednesday, and discussion on Thursday and Friday.

Pensions discussions winding down

The House Pensions Committee appears to be winding things down for the session. The committee held a hearing this morning on HB 2760 which moves the break in service days from 60 to 180 for working after retirement. There were no proponents for the bill.

There were two opponents and KNEA testified as neutral. At issue is an IRS regulation concerning pensions and a separation time specified for tax purposes. If the change is necessary to meet the regulations then it is appropriate to do. No other change should be considered.

The committee will continue the discussion regarding potential changes to the working after retirement (WAR) Bill at Wednesday's meeting and if there is a majority that of the committee that expresses interest, they could advance the bill. They may also "work bills previously heard" of which revisiting the Iran divestiture bill is one specifically mentioned by Chairman Johnson this morning.

This Friday will be the last day for the committee to meet this session.

At this time the chairman does not seem inclined to meet beyond this week.