

K-12 Education in the budget committees

Things seem to be about to gel in the education funding arena as the week draws to a close.

The House Appropriations Committee has been discussing school finance for a few days and appears ready to put a skeleton bill together - perhaps to be read in this evening. If so, the bill will be available for review tomorrow. Discussion on the bill will begin on Monday as the committee will not meet tomorrow.

Over in the Senate, the Ways and Means Committee took action today to spin K-12 education out of the big budget bill. It is their intent to consider the K-12 budget in a separate bill entirely. Tomorrow they are scheduled to work on SB 325, the big budget bill, so it appears they will not get going on K-12 until next week either.

What they could be doing is anyone's guess. Democrats have introduced bills in both chambers that would fund the \$129 million needed to solve the equity problem identified by the Supreme Court. In a press release yesterday, the Governor announced that "the equity issue raised by the court should be completely addressed this year" and that "the solution to the equity problem will require significant new funding." From that statement it would appear that the Governor also wants to fund equity and to use new money - not taking money from other sources - to solve it. Even the Kansas Policy Institute - a group that usually argues that schools don't need any money - has said the Legislature should fund the equity solution.

But past experience tells us that the Republicans in the House and Senate do not always march in lockstep with their own leadership. They've rejected some of the Governor's recommendations before and who knows what they might decide to do on school funding! We hope to find out next week.

Drug testing/fingerprinting bill passes Senate

Senate Bill 335 was passed by the Senate on a vote of 30 to 4 yesterday. The bill allows for drug testing of teachers when there is reasonable suspicion that the teacher is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. As it came to the floor it also included provisions for a

second test to rule out false positives and established a state "impaired teacher program" to provide support and help for any teacher with a positive test.

The bill was amended on the floor to eliminate the state program and instead mandate that every school district have such a program either on its own or in collaboration with another district or service center. This led one legislator to call the bill a massive unfunded mandate. Nevertheless, the bill passed.

SB 335 also requires that any teacher who was not fingerprinted upon application for their initial license, shall be fingerprinted upon their next license renewal.

The bill now goes to the House.

House Education Committee deals with student privacy

The House Education Committee today approved Senate Bill 367 which deals with the protection of student data. The bill was opposed by Walt Chappell and a number of extreme conservative groups.

An amendment by Rep. John Bradford (R-Lansing) that would have essentially ended the KIDS data system was rejected by the committee. A subsequent amendment by Rep. Amanda Grosserode (R-Lenexa) was adopted. The Grosserode amendment makes sure that biometric data (iris scans, fingerprints, etc.) would not be used and that there is more reporting on how data is being used and shared.

Grosserode has been a strong advocate of the KIDS system, believing that a good data collection system is necessary to informing Kansans about school performance. She has also worked diligently on the budget committees to make sure there was funding to keep the system running.

The bill with the Grosserode amendment was passed out of committee and now goes to the full House.

