

Back in town for a slow start to act II

The Legislature came back today to start up the second half of the 2014 legislative session. All bills had to have passed the chamber of origin by last Friday to be considered by the second chamber (unless, of course, they were conveniently stashed away in a committee that is exempt from timelines).

This is the time the House begins looking at what the Senate has passed and vice versa. So, just like the first half, the beginning of part two is slow. Not many committees have meetings this week.

The House and Senate Education Committees both cancelled meetings for today and will meet jointly tomorrow to learn about at-risk funding. They will not be meeting on Friday.

The all-day kindergarten special committee will meet Thursday morning.

The Senate Ways and Means hears three bills

The Senate Ways and Means Committee held hearings on three education-related bills today.

First up was Senate Bill 305 by Senator King. This bill would end capital improvement state aid for any new projects approved after July 2014 and transfer what would have been spent on new projects over to LOB equalization aid. Senator Jeff King (R-Independence) who asked for the bill said that this made sure that money was spent not on building new buildings but on classroom instruction.

Everyone else appearing was opposed to the bill with KASB outlining three excellent reasons to reject the bill:

- The bill is unnecessary because the state can afford both,
- The bill is unconstitutional because the Kansas Supreme Court has ruled that both must be equalized, and
- The bill is unwise because it would have a disproportionate impact on districts with less local property wealth.

The Kansas PTA also argued eloquently for the importance of good facilities in providing for student learning.

Senate Bill 277 was next. This bill extends for another five years a provision of the law that allows local school districts to calculate the LOB as if base state aid per pupil was \$4,433. This provision was first put in place as school aid was cut during the great recession. The provision is set to sunset in 2014 and this bill would move the sunset out to 2019. KNEA supports the bill.

Finally, there was an informational hearing on Senate Bill 369 which requires certain school districts to conduct studies to determine if they could be more efficient by consolidating administrative services. The State Department of Education would annually calculate the median spending on a list of administrative services and those districts spending above the median on any service would be required to do the study.

While only Topeka USD 501 outright opposed the bill, all the other testimony argued that much of the bill was ill-defined and open for much interpretation. It was suggested that interested legislators meet with administrators and school board members in order to clarify just what would be required, how it would be paid for, and what information the legislature was hoping to get from these studies.

No action was taken on any of these bills today.