

## Special Committee on all day K meets

While the stated purpose of today's hearing was to focus on the merits of all-day kindergarten for at-risk students in Kansas, a seemingly well-orchestrated attack and ensuing debate about public school funding actually took place. Mark Tallman of the Kansas Association of School Boards opened the hearing, sticking to the all-day kindergarten theme. Tallman expressed his members' support for all-day kindergarten in Kansas and went on to share specific data comparing the relationship of student achievement to at-risk student populations and adequate school funding.

Following Tallman was a presentation by Dave Trabert of the Kansas Policy Institute. Trabert opened by commending committee chairman, Representative Lunn and House Speaker Merrick for taking an approach to this issue based upon outcomes because this approach is "*rarely seen in education.*" While Trabert did mention that his group does not oppose all-day Kindergarten per se, he characterized school boards, administrators, and teachers as eager to use it simply to get more money.

During the discussion that followed Representative Winn called Trabert to task on his "outcomes" comment. Representative Boldra questioned Trabert's assertion that KASB's data unfairly compared Kansas achievement rates to national data. Trabert stated that in recent years, Kansas teachers and schools have so drastically lowered student expectations and currently teach to the minimum in an effort to conflate achievement and reduced school funding. In her rebuttal, Representative Boldra asked Trabert directly if he and his organization were now publicly supporting a system of common nationwide standards for measuring student achievement so that these kinds of comparisons would better align. The inference was obvious.

The final third of 90 minute hearing brought a few more general questions from the committee and one extended statement by Chairman Lunn. Here are some highlights of Representative Lunn's comments:

- Regulations restricting the ability to fire teachers need to be eliminated so that 'bad' teachers like could be removed.
- School boards and districts need to implement and account for the recommendations made by Governor Brownback's School Efficiency Task Force.

- Kansans need answers to why schools need more when, statewide, districts have added an average of 4.5 new adult staff members in each school.
- Many districts have unencumbered cash reserves and "money clanging around" that could be prioritized for other programs.
- Strong considerations for additional KPERS burdens, staffing burdens, and facility burdens need to be taken into account, particularly given that a Gannon ruling could increase the state's general expenditure on public education to 70%.
- Representative Lunn stated his personal belief that there is not enough research indicating that investing in programs like all-day kindergarten are worth the money.

The hearing was closed with Trabert's announcement that KPI has "hired a teacher." The role of their teacher was to share insight on how best to serve an inferred 'silent majority' of Kansas teachers who believe that all teachers should look more closely at how they can make better use of the dollars and resources the state has given them.

### **At-risk discussion in joint ed committee meeting**

A joint meeting of the House and Senate Education Committees was held to get answers to a set of questions posed by committee members.

Deputy Commissioner of Education Dale Dennis provided the committee with reams of data regarding school spending, the history of school finance since 1992, legislative changes in that time period in the funding formula and so much more. He was followed by Craig Neuenswander of the KSDE who filled the committee in on how at-risk money is generated and then how it is spent on moving kids to higher levels of achievement.

Neuenswander also provided data showing changes in the gap between low income students and others over time. While the gap had been shrinking slowly for years, it has widened a bit in the past year.

And of course, no meeting on school finance is complete is Dave Trabert isn't given time to call schools inefficient demanders of more money. Trabert's stump speech keeps reminding the committee members that when it comes to education, money doesn't matter, most kids are doing poorly, and schools are inefficient and have been hiring too many people. New in today's talk was the assertion that the Augenblick and

Myers school finance study ordered by the legislature and used against the state in the Montoy school finance law suit was based on "inflated numbers." No committee members challenged Trabert on this assertion. Trabert also called for a new cost study. We presume he'll volunteer to do it.

**The wait may be over!**

**Gannon decision due out tomorrow!**

It has been announced that the Gannon school finance lawsuit decision will be released tomorrow morning. Watch for news!