

The learning curve...on school finance

The House Appropriations Committee began their education on school finance this morning and their questions and comments were pretty revealing.

Much of what they wanted to discuss was centered on at-risk funding. Several legislators questioned why funding is distributed based on eligibility for free lunch. This is an annual debate. Years ago, the legislature chose free lunch eligibility as a proxy for at-risk because there is a significant correlation between poverty and likelihood of being at-risk of failure in school.

While the funding is generated on eligibility for free lunch, it is spent only on those students in at-risk programs approved by the State Board of Education, regardless of their income. So a high income student who does not generate at-risk funding but is performing very poorly on state assessments is in the program and using the additional money. Low income high achieving students who might generate the funding are not using it because they are not in an at-risk program. Many states use the same funding mechanism.

Legislators appeared to be pressing for two things: first, changing the criteria for generating the funding (either to actually qualifying for an at-risk program or based on census bureau poverty statistics) and secondly getting more legislative oversight of at-risk programs. Using census bureau poverty statistics would reduce at-risk funding because free lunch eligibility is set a 130% of the federal poverty level. Fewer students would qualify for funding.

There was also discussion of ending balances with at least on legislator asserting that the fact that there are ending balances in school districts indicates that they are adequately funded. If a district doesn't spend every dime by the end of the school year, then they have enough funding.

There are a number of these education sessions happening for various committees over the next week or two.

The learning curve...on school finance litigation

The House Education Committee heard a presentation by two staff attorneys on school finance litigation (Montoy, Gannon, et al) during yesterday's meeting.

There is still plenty of disagreement under the dome about what the decision really means. Many legislators continue to assert that the school finance formula itself was deemed as flawed and unconstitutional. But the attorneys were clear yesterday - and they repeated this at least four times - that the formula was not found to be unconstitutional; the formula AS FUNDED was. Essentially, the formula is fine but the inadequate funding is what is unconstitutional.

Appropriations Committee members made similar assertions today. Tomorrow they will hear from the Attorney General's office so things might become a little clearer.

And like the study of school finance, many committees are getting reviews of the litigation.

Capitol intrigue?

Representative John Edmonds (R-Great Bend) who had been appointed Vice Chair of the House Appropriations Committee has resigned both the Vice Chair position and his seat on the Appropriations Committee. We're not sure why, but this is not the first time there has been a shake-up in this committee.

Last year Chairman Rhoades (R-Newton) was pulled from the committee and replaced by Vice Chairman Gene Suellentrop (R-Wichita). Then at the start of this year, Suellentrop was not reassigned as Chair or Vice Chair. He was replaced by Rep. Ron Ryckman, Jr. (R-Olathe) although Suellentrop still serves on the Committee.

Rep. Sharon Schwartz (R-Washington) has been appointed Vice Chair. Replacing Edmonds on the Committee is Rep. Charles Macheers (R-Overland Park). Edmonds will be taking Macheer's seat on the House Pensions Committee which meets at the same time.

Links

Get a free Evernote account to save this article and
view it later on any device.

Create account