

TO: State Board of Education Members  
FROM: Mark Tallman, Assistant Executive Director/Advocacy  
Kansas Association of School Boards  
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**Subject: Policy Recommendations for 2007 Legislative Session**

The Kansas State Board of Education agenda for December includes a number of possible policy options that the board could adopt for the upcoming legislative session. These issues are listed in the board's background materials beginning on page 85. KASB would like to offer our comments on issues where our members have adopted positions.

**Teachers Not Licensed in the Classroom**

KASB educates our members about the state law requiring all school employees hold an appropriate, valid license in order to be paid a salary. For various reasons, that law is not always followed.

- KASB does not object to reports from the superintendent to local school boards on the number of unlicensed teachers (Option 1), but to minimize paperwork, it may not be necessary to require *monthly* reports. Such reports should be used to help school board members and the public understand the *reasons* for unlicensed personnel, which range from simple clerical glitches to the long-term problem of attracting and retaining people in education when other professions offer better compensation and working conditions.
- KASB does not object to teacher education scholarships (Option 2), but we note that several such programs already exist and were expanded last session. We suggest the Board consider whether additional funding should be allocated first to current programs that are not at their statutory funding levels, such as professional development and teacher mentoring programs.
- KASB opposed the KPERS surcharge on retired teachers and administrators and would support its repeal (Option 3).
- KASB also supports efforts to create more flexibility in hiring and retaining persons who have not completed traditional licensure requirements but can demonstrate competence through performance.

**English Immersion**

KASB generally opposes state curriculum mandates on local education programs. We are not aware of any research in Kansas which demonstrates particular approaches for teaching English Language Learners are more successful than others, or can be completed in a single year (Options 1 and 3). We do support efforts such as incentive grants to evaluate and promote "best practices" (Option 2).

**All-Day Kindergarten**

At our annual convention on Dec. 2, school board members across Kansas overwhelmingly supported funding for voluntary all-day kindergarten.

- We believe all-day kindergarten should be voluntary for both students and school districts and therefore would oppose a state mandate (Options 1 and 2). While we believe the strong evidence of the academic benefits and the parental and community support for all-day kindergarten will cause virtually all districts to embrace this program, we do not believe it is necessary or appropriate to make this a state requirement. Some districts do not have facilities to provide these programs at this time.
- Instead, we believe the state should provide incentives and support for districts which have or will make this choice by implementing full-time funding for full-time programs as soon as possible (Options 3, 5, 6 and 7).

- KASB would *especially* oppose requiring districts to offer all-day kindergarten *without* state funding, which would require districts to divert funding from other programs to meet this new mandate. While districts now have more options to pay for kindergarten by using at-risk funding, the amount of these funds vary considerably among districts. The state should not require districts to pay for a program the state is unwilling to fund.
- KASB opposes public funding of private schools (Option 4), which would require districts that cannot afford their own programs to subsidize all-day kindergarten in private schools.

### **High-Density At-Risk**

KASB policies support the concept of “phasing out” reductions in funding due to enrollment changes or other reasons. We would therefore support the “linear transition” for high-density at-risk weighting. Without this change, a district could lose significant aid due to very small changes in its free lunch eligible enrollment from year to year.

### **Non-Proficient At-Risk**

KASB specifically endorses using factors *in addition* to free lunch to determine the amounts of at-risk funding districts receive (see below). We supported the non-proficient funding last session and support its continuation, and/or the use of other non-poverty-based factors.

### **School Finance**

KASB is very skeptical about maintaining a “rolling three-year plan” by having the legislature determine school funding three years out, for the following reasons.

- First, despite the attractiveness of “long range planning,” a legislature cannot bind future legislatures, and no one can predict the economy with certainty. If school districts believe future years of a plan are “guaranteed,” they are likely in for a shock at some point.
- Second, the legislature spent much of the debate over the current plan arguing about which economic assumptions to use in determining what the state could afford over a three-year period. We believe multi-year plans would tend to be treated as a “ceiling” for school funding, rather than a “floor.” If revenues are higher than anticipated, schools won’t benefit because they will have been “already funded.” Yet if revenues are lower than expected, school funding could still be reduced to avoid tax increases or cuts in other programs.
- Finally, we believe school funding should be based on actual costs as directed by the Supreme Court, and it is very difficult to anticipate the cost of inflation, wage increases and new program requirements three years in the future. Even under the current three-year plan, base budget increases are less than half the projected rate of inflation.

### **Criteria for Determining At-Risk Students**

KASB supports using *both* free lunch eligibility (as a measure of poverty) *and* other factors to determine the amount of funding districts should receive to serve at-risk students.

- We believe free lunch is the best, although imperfect, measure of the socio-economic status of a school district (Option 1). Local, state and federal assessments, plus abundant independent research, demonstrate districts with higher rates of poverty, particularly urban poverty, will have more difficulty in bringing all students to high standards of achievement.
- However, we know some lower income children do well in school without special assistance, and some economically advantaged children need extra help. Therefore, we support *adding* factors to free lunch, including the number of students failing to demonstrate proficiency on state assessments (Option 2) and other factors that indicate a child is at-risk (Option 3).

- In considering at-risk factors, we believe districts should not have to “wait for students to fail” in order to receive funding. Likewise, districts should not necessarily lose funding as test scores improve. Rising achievement may not mean that at-risk funding should be reduced; it may simply mean that those funds are having a positive effect.

### **Site-Based Budgeting**

Like many legislators and patrons, school board members share concerns school district budgets are complex and hard to understand. However, past studies have indicated a state-mandated system of site-based budgeting could be expensive, time-consuming and of limited value.

KASB’s 2007 School Finance Resolution supports efforts to improve clarity and understanding in the school finance system and the budget process, provided these changes do not increase unfunded costs. Before the State Board attempts to require a site-based budgeting system, we believe the following questions must be answered:

- What is the cost of developing such a system, both to the state and local school districts, including training and transition costs? (If this has been implemented in other states and districts, what did they spend and how effective has it been?)
- How meaningful are “fully allocated” costs at the building level when many decisions, such as teacher salaries, special education expenditures, etc., are by state law determined at the school district level or even by cooperative special education programs?
- How meaningful are comparisons between school buildings when Kansas districts and schools vary so dramatically by size, student populations, physical plant and community circumstances?
- How much additional time will district personnel have to spend to allocate district-wide costs to individual buildings?

What works in California or Canada, where school-based budgets are purported to have been tried, often does not reflect the situation in Kansas. Under current law, districts are free to develop accounting and budgeting methods in response to the needs of local constituents, whether in Wichita, Winfield or Weskan. KASB wants to be sure budget changes will be meaningful and effective, not just an expensive “silver bullet” that simply expands 296 complicated district budgets into 1,600 complicated building budgets.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact KASB if you have any questions about these issues.