

News from the Kansas State Board of Education Meeting of November, 2011

- **Governor's School Finance Plan** Landon Fulmer, the Governor's policy advisor, shared the broad outline of a proposed school finance formula. A number of you, local BOE members particularly, have already heard Mr. Fulmer describe the formula reform in regional meetings around the state. If not, the superintendents of local districts have shared what they know with local stakeholders. Fulmer stated that not all details had been worked out and that they still had not run the numbers to show how the plan would work. He did believe those numbers might be available before the Board's December meeting. The Board invited Fulmer to return when numbers were available.
- **I will just say that any formula that goes through the legislative process will see many, many changes before it is enacted. I appreciate the willingness to have a serious conversation about how we will follow the Constitution's mandate to provide for the suitable funding of K-12 education.**
- **Graduation requirements** The discussion centered around the state's current requirement of 21 credits and whether 21 is sufficient to ensure students are college and career ready upon graduation. Information provided by KSDE indicated that 98% of high schools require more than 21 credits to graduate and that the average number of required credits is 25.

Some members of the Board expressed the desire to keep existing graduation requirements, allowing local districts the flexibility to increase those requirements. However, there was concern about how schools respond to high school juniors who do not pass the 11th grade assessments in reading and math. Board members indicated a need to have some assurance that those students receive instruction that would help them meet standards in those assessments prior to graduation.

Additional items discussed included the potential for a course on college and career readiness that would assist students in making the transition from high school to college or other post-secondary pursuits, and adopting a high school assessment that was more geared to determining college and career readiness.

(I would really appreciate feedback on this graduation issue.)

Presentation on music education Craig Manteuffel, director of bands in Hays and president of the Kansas Music Educators Association (KMEA), and Mike Quilling, a band and choral director in Deerfield and KMEA vice president, shared information on the impact of recent budget cuts on music programs in Kansas schools. A survey by KMEA's Advocacy Committee, in which 190 of the 293 districts participated, indicates that 185 music positions have been cut in the past three years. Of those, 124 were in the past year and 61 in the year prior.

Manteuffel and Quilling said cuts were resulting in remaining staff taking on additional positions, managing more students per class, requiring some elementary teachers to split their days to include multiple schools, among other options. Board members were quick to point out the likelihood that all of the fine arts areas were seeing similar cuts based on reduction in state aid for schools. Members expressed concern about the situation, but indicated that they thought programs would continue to struggle as the state's budget picture was not likely to change substantially in the near future.

- **Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge** Kansas applied for this grant in October. The grant is intended for states that create comprehensive plans to transform early learning systems for children birth to age 5. KSDE was the lead agency in preparing the grant request, but the final product was a collaborative effort among KSDE, KDHE, SRS, and the Children's Cabinet. The Governor signed and submitted the request.

The grant focuses on improving early learning and development programs by supporting efforts to:

- Increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs;
- Design/implement an integrated system of high-quality programs and services; and
- Ensure that assessments conform to the recommendations of the National Research Council's reports on early childhood.

Kansas could receive around \$25 million if its application is approved. The state expects to learn whether its application has been approved by the end of December.

- **Annual report on virtual schools and programs** Mark Evans, chair of the Virtual Advisory Council, told Board members that the number of students in virtual programs had increased by 396 since 2009,

while the number in virtual schools had increased by 2,140 over the same time period. He also shared that the number of students in charter schools had increased by 1,418 since 2009. There are six new virtual programs in 2011-2012 and two new virtual schools. Much of the growth is occurring in the central part of the state.

The report also included the progress on state assessment of students in virtual settings and charter schools. All student groups had seen improvement since 2008-2009, and the greatest improvement was among students in virtual programs. Those students performing at "meets standards or above" on the reading assessments had increased by nearly 33 percentage points since 2008-2009, reaching 92.5% in 2010-11. In math, those same students improved their performance at "meets standards or above" by nearly 12 percentage point.

- **Blue Ribbon Schools:** Representatives from the state's five 2011 Blue Ribbon Schools made presentations, detailing the programs and policies they believe helped their school achieve Blue Ribbon status. Those presenting were Dave Tappan, principal of Louisburg High School; Shawna Evans, principal of MacArthur Elementary in Liberal; Cindy Sanders, Principal of Oswego High School; Dustin Mortensen, principal of Sunflower Elementary in Gardner-Edgerton; and Randy Roberts, principal of Union Valley Elementary in Buhler.
- In addition to their regular meeting, Board members had a work session on the state's ESEA waiver application. KSDE plan to complete the waiver request by the end of January, 2012 for submission to the U.S. Department of Education in February.
- The next Board meeting is December 13-14 in Topeka.

