

House and Senate Education Committees

Joint Meeting

Tuesday, January 22, 2013

Cheryl L. Semmel, Executive Director

On behalf of United School Administrators of Kansas (USA|Kansas) and our Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you to discuss our organization and public education in Kansas.

The mission of USA|Kansas, through collaboration of member associations, is to serve, support and develop educational leaders and to establish USA|Kansas as a significant force to improve education. To this end, our organization focuses on policy development, school funding, leadership development and professional networking. We value our relationships with members of the Legislature, the State Board of Education and the Kansas Board of Regents.

USA|Kansas is a statewide "umbrella" organization comprised of individual administrators and ten school administrator associations. The USA|Kansas Board of Directors is comprised of K-12 public education administrators appointed by each of the following organizations:

- Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals (KAESP)
- Kansas Association of Middle School Administrators (KAMSA)
- Kansas Association of School Business Officials (KASBO)
- Kansas Association of School Personnel Administrators (KASPA)
- Kansas Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (KASCD)
- Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators (KASEA)
- Kansas Association of Secondary School Principals (KASSP)
- Kansas Council of Career and Technical Education Administrators (KCCTEA)
- Kansas School Public Relations Association (KanSPRA)
- Kansas School Superintendents' Association (KSSA)

Our funding is derived from three primary sources: membership dues, association management service agreements and professional development activities. Invoices for individual member dues are sent to administrators and they may choose whether to pay via credit card, personal check or payroll reduction.

The USA|Kansas Legislative Committee is comprised of the presidents of our member organizations; the School Finance Task Force is comprised of superintendents, special education and career and technical education administrators. The 2013 USA|Kansas Legislative Priorities are included with this testimony.

College and Career Readiness

The Governor has stated that education is the most important function of state government. Administrators agree the best thing we can do for our state is provide a quality education for every student to ensure there is an educated work-force and an innovative entrepreneurial culture in Kansas that will help grow our economy.

This past Fall, we solicited feedback from administrators across the state – at the building and district level, from special education and career and technical education leaders – to identify what skills were necessary to prepare Kansas students for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. That work culminated in our support of the State Board of Education adopting a definition for college and career readiness that establishes high expectations and corresponding benchmarks, beyond just math and English. And, equally as important, we are focused on determining what assessments and tools are most viable and best measure student progress.

USA|Kansas believes that the work we do now to raise the bar on student learning and skill development will translate into a more informed citizenry that will strengthen our economy.

Career and Technical Education

Administrators believe that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs play a vital role in making students “**workforce ready.**” We also know that these programs are powerful tools for engaging students who may struggle to see the relevance in traditional “college-prep” programs.

Far too often, there has been a perception that CTE programs are less rigorous and are the “fallback plan” for students. This couldn’t be further from the truth. What we know is that high quality CTE programs are no less rigorous and, in fact, require mastery of the same standards included in the traditional college preparation programs. More recently, CTE programs have been recognized for their integration of 21st Century Skills and project-based curriculum.

USA|Kansas is encouraged to see that CTE programs are a priority for state leaders and are hopeful that, with all stakeholders working together, our students will be poised to positively impact the Kansas economy.

Innovation and Excellence

There are many schools throughout Kansas that have implemented or are developing unique programs of innovation and excellence. In many cases, these districts have partnered with other organizations, local government and private industry to make the academic work students engage in even more relevant. Some of those programs include:

- *The Advanced Automation Robotics Program* at Topeka USD 501
- *The Center for Advance Professional Studies* at Blue Valley USD 229
- *The C³ - Citizenship, College and Career Readiness Initiative* at McPherson USD 418
- *The Home Construction Partnership Program* at Seaman USD 345
- *Personalized Learning Programs* at Erie USD 101
- *The Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Program* at Stafford USD 349
- *T3, Transforming Tonganoxie Together* at Tonganoxie USD 464
- *The Walton Rural Life Center* at Newton USD 373

This list is not all-inclusive, but intends to show that schools of different sizes, student populations and geographic locations are focused on delivering quality programs for students. The programs will vary significantly based on local community needs, support and resources. Your committees will have the opportunity to hear from several school districts over the coming days and I encourage you to ask them questions about the allocation of resources for implementation, how they intend to maintain these programs *and* what impact these programs are having on student success.

Last year, USA|Kansas supported the Governor's concept of "seed money" or grants for innovative programs. There are many innovative programs being developed in Kansas school districts, aimed at making school more relevant to the students we serve, but we could be doing more.

Funding Our Schools

School administrators across Kansas are committed to strengthening an ever-changing education system – balancing state and federal mandates (and funding streams) with the needs of students and our future workforce. **We see the Legislature as our partner in achieving this.**

USA|Kansas has continually supported the formula and funding levels enacted by the Kansas Legislature in 2006. Through targeted funding, schools were able to invest in programs and services to help our students achieve academic proficiency and success. Investments in K-12 education positively impacted student performance on state assessments and the achievement gap narrowed.

Although administrators believe the current funding formula is sound, we recognize that there is a lot of interest in discussing how education is funded and in defining "suitable education." USA|Kansas is committed to working with you and supports working collaboratively to define a suitable provision for finance that ensures Kansas students receive a quality education that helps them reach their potential and become successful, productive citizens.

School district administrators support a multi-year funding plan that allows us to be better stewards of our patrons' tax dollars. A multi-year plan would enable school boards and administrators to engage in long-term planning and would encourage innovation and efficiency.

Administrators know there are many competing interests for limited state dollars and that you are called upon to make difficult choices. However, we believe the education of our children and youth must remain a top priority to keep our state strong in the years to come. As you consider any changes to education policy or school funding, we encourage you to call upon USA|Kansas and your local administrators for the particular knowledge and expertise we may provide.



2013 Legislative Positions

Tax and Revenue

- USA|Kansas supports a balanced tax policy that provides a stable revenue stream to enhance economic growth, financial stability, and a strong public education system.

School Funding

- USA|Kansas supports multi-year funding for school finance to create stability and allow for the efficiencies and effectiveness that can be gained through advanced, long-term planning.
- USA|Kansas believes any school that receives public funds must meet state and federal accountability standards and provide programs/services required of public schools.

Cash Balances

- USA|Kansas believes that school districts must maintain unrestricted cash balances at levels needed to manage cash flow in financial challenges and emergencies.

College and Career Readiness

- USA|Kansas supports plans to ensure that students are prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.
- USA|Kansas believes career and technical education programs must be relevant and support both student and future workforce needs.

Special Education

- USA|Kansas supports full funding of the excess costs of special education.
- USA|Kansas supports the Kansas State Board of Education's guidance and regulations on Emergency Safety Intervention.
- USA|Kansas believes that students with special learning needs are best supported by comprehensive special education programs and that special learning needs should continue to be administered in a manner consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

Teachers

- USA|Kansas supports policies that sustain highly effective teachers and administrators.
- USA|Kansas believes that effective teachers should have due process rights.
- USA|Kansas believes that teacher evaluation should not be subject to negotiation and that it should be removed from the Kansas Professional Negotiations Act.

School Safety

- USA|Kansas supports safe learning environments for students.
- USA|Kansas believes that any new school safety initiatives should include funding for implementation and delivery.

Local Control

- USA|Kansas believes locally elected school board members are best equipped to make financial, managerial, and operational decisions that are in the best interest of students in their respective school districts.