

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Barbara Lawrence at 9:00 a.m. on February 15, 2000 in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Senators Emert, Hensley and Umbarger - Excused

Committee staff present: Avis Swartzman, Revisor of Statutes
Ben Barrett, Legislative Research Department
Jackie Breymeyer, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Alexa Pochowski, Ph.D., State Director, Special Education

Others attending: See Attached List

The Chairperson called the meeting to order and introduced Alexa Pochowski, who was present to give an overview of what the Department of Education is doing in the special education area..

Ms. Pochowski stated the question that is asked repeatedly is, what is the reason for the increase in the number of special education teachers and paraprofessionals without a corresponding increase in the number of students. She attributed this to five factors: laws and regulations; societal changes; systems change; instructional practice and student outcomes.

She asked the committee to follow along with the handout that had been distributed (Attachment 1) The attachment contained a decade overview of number of students, disabled and gifted. While the gifted has remained static, the students with disabilities has increased. Paraprofessionals have now outpaced the number of professionals. Ms. Pochowski referred to a graph that showed the gifted group remained static, while the students that have been identified with disabilities corresponded directly with the increase in professionals; the paraprofessionals show a further increase over the last three years.

Ms. Pochowski commented that if the decade is looked at in terms of sheer numbers, from 1990 to 2000, the number of students served has gone from the approximate numbers of 45,000 to 58,000; professionals from 5,000 to over 6,000 and paraprofessionals from 3,5000 to 7,500. A chart showed why so many changes have occurred, this having to do with laws and regulations. Special education is only two decades old and it continues to grow. In 1990, zero special education children were being served in private schools, now thousands are served. Transition services are now required at age 14. Assistive technology needs must be met. Services must be provided to those students who are suspended/expelled for more than ten days. Parents are, and need to be , well informed.

Continuing with the attachment, Ms. Pochowski stated that in 1975 there were more than a million students with disabilities who were not attending school. This is not true anymore. In little more than two decades, the public school system has ensured children with disabilities the right to a free appropriate public education, an achievement unparalleled anywhere in the world. Some of the societal changes that have occurred have been deinstitutionalization of children with mental/physical disabilities, advances in medical procedures and the increased number and type of medical diagnosis.

The next several charts showed the number of interrelated professionals that work with the teacher in the classroom with behavioral disorders. Included in this were paraprofessionals, specialists in behavioral disorders, nurses, mental health workers, social workers and transition personnel.

In response to a question each disorders, Ms. Pochowski, stated there does not have to be a person certified in each disorder area, but persons must be highly knowledgeable. Specialists are needed in all areas. Using autism as an example, Ms. Pochowski stated that prior to 1995, the prevalence of students with autism was 4 in 10,000; now the ratio is 80 to 10,000. This is due to better identification and stated that ausbergers, a more mild form of autism has been identified. She also explained that interrelated means that a teacher works in an interrelationship with all students regardless of different disabilities.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, Room 123-S Statehouse, at 9:00 a.m. on February 15, 2000.

In 1990, there were 125 paras working with 251 other health impaired students; in 2000 there are 1988 paras working with over 3900 other health impaired, or OHI students.

Because of the number of acronyms used in describing the different special education disorders, Ms. Pochowski was asked to provide a key that would define each acronym.

Continuing, Ms. Pochowski stated that teachers no longer just teach; they collaborate, consult, modify, facilitate, write and document; their task has increased a hundredfold. Districts have more intensive and effective recruitment and retention efforts.

It was asked if the severe shortage in special education teachers was not due to their leaving special education or the education field entirely, but to the growth in numbers of special education students.

Ms. Pochowski replied that 10% of staff is lost each year; this is comparable to general education. Over a three-year period about 30% of staffing is lost; again, this is comparable to general education. Special education teachers do not necessarily exit the system, but tend to go to general education.

One of the committee was told that there are over 220 people with special education degrees who are not working in Kansas schools; thousands could teach special education, but choose not to teach. There are people who wish that special education is not on their teaching degree so they could go back to the regular classroom and not be called or have a contract given to them that they have to teach special education.

Mr. Dennis, Deputy Education Commissioner, responded that a teacher had asked that special education be taken off the certificate because of the fear of being moved from regular education to special education.

Ms. Pochowski stated that the use of alternative licensure has been enhanced where persons in general education can be used while they are seeking certification in special education. She mentioned KEEB, the Kansas Educational Employment Board, that is online throughout the country. People can put their resumes online. They can be sent to any district. They have received resumes from throughout the United States, as well as Canada and France.

Speaking of inclusion, Ms. Pochowski stated that there has been a move away from segregated classrooms. By separating classrooms, there were different standards and expectations for students. With effective educational practices, schools can educate well and together, a wide range of students. Separation is costly and a cause for limited outcomes for students with disabilities. Fifty-five percent of children with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, are not fully included in regular classes; 71% of the 5.7 million students with disabilities served have the least severe impairments, learning disabilities (51%) and speech/language (20%).

Ms. Pochowski ended the overview by stating that the goal is the same for special education students as for general education students; the same expectations, standards, assessments, high graduation rate and gainful employment. She gave a quote she often uses, "There is a greater tragedy than being labeled as a slow learner—and that is being treated as one."

Several questions were raised and comments raised on Ms. Pochowski's overview. She stated that she would have the answers, along with a summary of acronyms used in the overview.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Pochowski for her concise overview and adjourned the meeting.