

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jean Schodorf at 1:35 p.m. on March 9, 2006, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

Committee members absent:

Committee staff present: Carolyn Rampey, Kansas Legislative Research Department  
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes  
Shirley Higgins, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Michael Stewart, Director of Research & Analytics, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services  
Jason Kingston, Lead Project Analyst and Associate Director, Applied Analytics, Standard & Poor's  
Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, Kansas State Department of Education

**Briefing on Final Report on Standard & Poor's Kansas Educational Resource Management Study**

Michael Stewart, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services, noted that the study was funded by the Kauffman Foundation, and the study's focus reflects the need to increase the "return" on educational investments, not simply the amount of money spent. He went on to discuss the three phases of the study. Phase 1 provided academic, financial, and demographic data on every district for analysis. In this phase, the districts which performed better on state reading and math tests than most other comparable districts were identified (highly resource-effective districts). In Phase 2, four districts were selected for site visits and in-depth study. In this phase, "best practices" were documented to help other districts improve. Phase 3, the final report, offers state policymakers and local school leaders a set of guiding principles around the effective use of money, staff, time, and programs. (Attachment 1)

Jason Kingston, Standard & Poor's, discussed the use of financial resources in Kansas' highly resource-effective districts (Phase 3). In the process, he referred to a Standard & Poor's booklet concerning the final phase of the study entitled, "Phase III: A Synthesis of Highly Resource-Effective District Strategies." He noted that individualized reports and all information in the booklet could be found on the Internet at [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com). He explained that the whole purpose for analyzing and documenting the resource allocation practices was to provide an information resource for district superintendents, state education officials, and lawmakers. He discussed the findings when the 17 highly resource-effective districts were compared to the statewide average of all districts in Kansas and to the state's 20 less resource-effective districts.

Senator Apple asked, "How do we turn this from information into making an impact throughout the state?" Mr. Stewart responded, "It's actually a conversation that we've been having with Governor Sebelius. She's asked the same question because these studies run the risk of not being read or, even if they are read, put on a shelf. Several recommendations we've provided the Governor that were talking about how to best move forward would involve working directly with a professional association, such as the Council of School Superintendents or the Kansas Association of School Business Officials or with the educational service agencies, and working with them directly on how to disseminate this information. We've also proposed to create units of study for those individuals who are in our colleges of education, particularly the graduate level, who are learning and getting the degree programs and the certifications that are going to be needed to assume the role of superintendent or school business official so that these kinds of findings can find their way into colleges and schools of education as we prepare our future leaders. We've even probed some possibilities of how to tie these findings in with the school improvement plans that schools and districts have to prepare if they do not make adequate yearly progress because we know that they have to actually address not just the pedagogy and instructional programs that they will attempt to change but also how they will use their resources to affect those changes. That would involve working closely with the professional associations and with the departments of education, which we hope to be able to do as we proceed further."

## CONTINUATION SHEET

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With regard to a comparison table shown on page six of the handout, Senator Vratil commented that he found it interesting that the most highly resource-effective districts actually spend less in the classroom than the state average and the low resource-effective districts. Mr. Stewart responded, "Yes, we noticed the same thing, not only with the detailed findings in Kansas, but we've also published a report for the nation as a whole as part of the School Matters project I mentioned where we had actually looked at upwards of fourteen states to determine whether or not there is any correlation between the percentage of funds spent in the classroom and the percentage of students who are meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and math. In all fourteen states, we found no significant correlation between those two."

Senator Vratil asked, "Would you, as statistical analysts, say that there is a correlation or is not a correlation if I tell you that Kansas provides funding for 135,000 at-risk students, those who qualify for free lunch, but there are 200,000 students who are receiving at-risk services in Kansas. Is there a correlation there?" Mr. Stewart answered, "I would imagine you would have overlap, but not having seen the data or the definitions of the those terms, I would hesitate to give any definitive answer. But, because students who are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch are by definition coming from economically disadvantaged households, that, in and of itself, is generally regarded as a risk factor, a factor that is highly correlated with academic performance. So my guess is that there would be some overlap, but, again, not knowing the technical specifications of the data you referred to, I'd need to reserve judgement."

Senator Schodorf commented to the conferees, "I couldn't agree with you more that Kansas cannot afford to simply spend it's way to 100 percent proficiency. That's the dilemma that we are in right now, not just with the lawsuit but with the proficiency levels to 100 percent. That's the problematic area – what we're going to do about that. One thing that kind of jumped out also was that the districts were spending less than the average but they also spent more on principal's salaries. Would you say that it was two things, they increased contracts for teachers for planning." Mr. Mitchell responded, "That is probably one of the most fascinating findings in the study. In all four districts, the teacher contracts exceeded the number of student contact days between 11 and 15 days. In three of the districts, they had 15 more days in the teacher contract than they did student contact days. The other one was about 10 or 11. Overall, that was very significant. We found it significant because it was unusual. We asked around. We were told that, at least according to the teacher's union in Kansas, that number of days is typically 5, not 15. Certainly the districts that we interviewed attributed some of their better performance to that feature of the contract."

Senator Schodorf asked Mr. Stewart if the additional minutes per day for reading and math was statistically significant. Mr. Stewart said, "Whether it was statistically significant was not the question we asked, but it was significant enough particularly on the cumulative basis. The better question is, is it educationally significant. I would say so, in my judgement."

Due to the time limitation, Senator Schodorf closed the discussion on the study.

Dale Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, Kansas Department of Education, distributed copies of memorandum on school finance along with a computer printout (SF6072) which provided further detailed information on how the mandatory 2.5 percent of local option budget required to be transferred to the general fund works, based upon his understanding of the concept. He noted that the information was in county order and from low to high. He followed with a column explanation and responded to questions. (Attachment 2) Mr. Dennis also gave a column explanation for the handout he distributed at the March 8 meeting regarding increases in state aid within selected categorical programs as provided in the Senate school finance plan, **SB 584** (SF6071).

Written testimony submitted by Dr. Walt Chappell, President, Educational Management Consultants, regarding the definition of the at-risk student was distributed to the Committee as requested by Dr. Chappell. (Attachment 3)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2006.