

State Representative

Don Hineman

Don's Legislative Update
January 11, 2015

Redefining Public Education in Kansas

As I reported in my [last newsletter](#), there are likely some big changes ahead for public education in Kansas, due in part to the school funding court decision released in late December. Although the final outcome of that court suit may be delayed, it will trigger legislative activity almost immediately.

Revising the School Funding Formula

Governor Brownback and others want to revise the formula, [calling it too complicated and unworkable](#). In the governor's words, "...we ought to just open the whole thing up. It's just that the formula has grown very complex, convoluted (and) questionable. ... you ought to open it up, redo it and sunset it in four years so you're having a regular discussion about where half of your state general fund goes."

I believe the formula is complex because what it is designed to accomplish is complex. The authors of the school funding formula may not have had the [Rose Standards](#) in mind back in 1992 as they crafted and later refined the formula, but I believe the formula is in fact in harmony with the objective of the Rose Standards. It is designed to direct the money to where it is most needed. It sends extra funds to those school districts with student populations that are more difficult and therefore more expensive to educate.

It may be time to review the entire formula with a view to making it appropriate to today's student population and to verify that the various weightings are valid. But if folks attempt to revise the formula with an objective of simplifying and saving a great deal of money then we will have moved away from both **equity** and **adequacy** of funding... exactly the issues that got us embroiled in the court case in the first place.

Public Dollars for Private Education

Some legislators see an opportunity to implement policy reforms that involve diverting public funds toward private schools or home schooling. In fact, the first step in that direction was taken with the education appropriation bill last spring. It included provision for state subsidies of corporate scholarships for private education... a significant use of public funds in Kansas for the benefit of private education. That provision was one of the primary reasons that I voted no on the bill.

But here is the thing: public education does not exist for the benefit of students or for the benefit of their parents. **It exists for the benefit of the social order.** Public schools were established in America to insure that future generations of citizens have an appreciation for democratic values, understand our common American heritage, and have the skills to be productive members of society. It isn't necessary for one to be a student or



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Department On Aging
800-432-3535

Child/Adult Abuse Hotline
800-922-5330

Child & Family Services
888-369-4777

Consumer Protection
800-423-2310

Crime Tip Hotline
800-252-8477

the parent of a student to benefit from public education. Each of us benefits each and every day by the existence of a well-educated populace.

Some feel that public education is not the right choice for their child, for a variety of reasons, but often that reason has to do with religion. Those individuals are certainly free to choose private alternatives but that choice does not entitle them to public funds for private schooling.

The following link is a very eloquent defense of public education from Pastor Vernon C. Tyson, a United Methodist preacher from Raleigh, North Carolina. Though he wrote it concerning North Carolina public schools, it could just as easily have been written about Kansas schools. [The problems with NC vouchers and sending public money to private schools.](#)

Wichita Eagle: [Education in Crosshairs](#)

Capturing School District Reserve Funds

Some are suggesting that the state should raid school district reserve funds since there is a significant amount of money available there. But there are problems with that logic. Some of those funds never came from the state, but were from local sources or the federal government. The state obviously has no right to those funds. And the funds that did come from the state were distributed through the school funding formula, designed to get the dollars where the need is greatest. If the state were to now reclaim those funds, it would raise serious questions with regard to both equity and adequacy of funding, once again raising the specter of future lawsuits.

Aside from the question of legality, there is the practical effect that sweeping these funds would have. We would be training every school district in Kansas to spend every dollar we send them with the knowledge that if they don't we will take it back. We would be rewarding those districts who spent every last dollar since they would have no reserves to recapture. We would also be penalizing those districts who were fiscally prudent and responsible, spending only what was necessary and saving the rest for unforeseen contingencies. That can't be sound fiscal policy, and it amazes me that anyone thinks that is a good idea.

There are several valid reasons that schools carry healthy reserve balances at the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

1. June 30 is traditionally the end of one school year cycle and the start of another. Many of the purchases for the coming school year are made in July and August so school districts need to have adequate reserves available to cover those purchases.
2. Districts often build up reserves in anticipation of an upcoming capital purchase such as a new school bus, a new boiler, or other remodel project.
3. Carrying some cash in reserve is a sound, conservative principle for any individual or entity, whether public or private. During my service on the boards of several state and national level livestock associations we were repeatedly advised that trade associations should carry reserves that equal 50% of annual revenues. The appropriate figure may be somewhat different for school districts but there is no doubt they need significant money in reserve. Part of that is due to the uncertain nature of state aid to schools. During the recent recession the state was experiencing cash flow problems, and frequently was late in making scheduled payments to schools. Given the tight budget situation the state is now facing, I expect those cash flow issues to again be a problem. When that happens the schools

Crime Victim Assistance
800-828-9745

Gov- Brownback
800-748-4408

Highway Road Conditions
511 (in Kansas)

Housing Hotline
800-752-4422

KanCare Assistance
866-305-5147

Kansas Lottery
800-544-9467

Legislative Hotline
800-432-3924

Mental Health Services
888-582-3759

School Safety Hotline
877-626-8203

Social Security
800-772-1213

Taxpayer Assistance
785-368-8222

Tax Refund Status
800-894-0318

Unclaimed Property
800-432-0386

Unemployment Insurance
800-292-6333

Vital Statistics
785-296-1400

Voter Registration
800-262-8683

Welfare Fraud Hotline
800-432-3913

Worker's Comp
800-332-0353

will need to rely on their cash reserves to get by until the state check shows up in the mailbox.

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This newsletter is primarily intended for the residents of the 118th District (all of Wichita, Scott, Lane, Logan, Gove, Trego, and Sheridan Counties and portions of Thomas and Graham Counties). However it is available to anyone who finds it of interest. Please forward to your friends, or if you are not now receiving a FREE subscription to my newsletter, [click here to sign up](#).

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Cowboy Logic

If I agreed with you, we would both be wrong.

Quote of the day

“Common sense is not so common” – **Voltaire**

Sermon in a sentence

The smallest good deed is better than the grandest intentions.

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