



Reporter

Volume 22, Number 3

March 2007

SCHOOLS FOR QUALITY EDUCATION, INC.

Public Relations Message

Alternative Models for Secondary Schools in Doubt

The Department of Legislative Post Audit recently revealed their findings on alternative models for middle and high schools in Kansas. The audit was requested by the 2010 Commission as it looks at ways to improve education in grades K-12 in Kansas. The document's introduction contained a history of education in our country, revealing very little change has taken place in how children were educated from 1893 to present day. Only after the release of "A Nation At Risk" in 1983, were reform efforts actively sought across the country. The audit attempted to examine various formats and delivery systems that have found their way into our schools. They looked at a wide variety of reform efforts - schools in Kansas where they had been implemented and the level of effectiveness in improving academic performance. The report touched on alternative scheduling, theme-based programs, small learning communities, alternative instructional formats and comprehensive school reform. Realizing that change for the sake of change was not necessarily successful, they also sought research to support the effectiveness of each method. It was quickly apparent that most of the reform efforts showed limited to no significant improvement or lacked what post audit call "rigorous research" to indicate they were doing a better job of educating our students. The twenty-two page document described thirty-three different models, programs, methods and approaches to delivering secondary education. In appraising each they found 17 of them lacking rigorous research to support their effectiveness. Six reform efforts showed limited results, while three were inconclusive and one was actually determined to have a negative effect on learning. Five were credited with showing moderate academic success. But only one "creating small schools" was found to be strongly effective. The document stated: "Of 31 studies examining school size and student achievement, half found achievement in small schools to be superior to that of large schools. None of the studies found large schools superior to small schools". It further said, "No large public middle or high school in Kansas have used this model, although many small schools exist because of their rural location".

Alternative Scheduling Models considered by Post Audit including *Block scheduling* has been implemented by two-fifths of the high schools in Kansas. Although the premise is that students could spend more concentrated time under this approach, three out of seven rigorous studies that examined the effects of block scheduling found that this method actually had a negative effect on their performance.

Year Round School has been discussed regularly in education circles, but has not been initiated in any Kansas high schools. The Post Audit findings looked at 58 schools across the country now offering year-round education. They found that 62% of the districts had somewhat better performance; however, these schools are not in session more days than Kansas schools. Their days are just spread out throughout the year and are more likely to be configured that way to resolve overcrowding and increase availability of extra-curricular activities. It is also possible that numerous mini-breaks allows students and teachers time to recharge their batteries.

The *Extended Day or Week* option, which would allow time to study a subject in more depth or more interaction between the students and teachers, has not been utilized in Kansas schools. There is no rigorous research to suggest that this approach is effective in improving student performance. The additional expense and lack of willingness to give up other activities in order to allow for such expansion may be factors that have served as disincentives.

Theme Based Program Models. *College Prep, Career Pathways, Technical Programs and Magnet Schools* are all inclined to allow for more relevant coursework, spur students to focus on career planning, and allow for more parent and student choice. However, there is concern that these approaches may encourage students to make career choices prematurely, while these program offerings are inclined to be very expensive to school districts. In addition, such theme-based programs need to be aligned with the schools' long-range plan, require more planning, and districts must be careful that they reflect what students need. A number of such offerings are available in large and small schools across the state. Yet, Post Audit

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

was unable to find solid research to support the effectiveness of such programs.

Alternative Instructional Format Models. Reform that deals with alternative instructional format models included *Project Based, Virtual Schools, Mall Schools, Individualized Learning and Paideia* were found in 10 schools across the state. All of them are a departure from the standard delivery system. They are more likely to be tailored to meet students' interests and abilities. These approaches are geared to give students a hands on experience as well as more flexibility. But along with the flexibility, challenges may arise in making materials accessible and interesting and being sure that teachers are being adequately trained to adjust to varying student needs. Again there is not extensive research to suggest that these methods make a significant difference in student performance.

Comprehensive School Reform Models. Commercial school success programs such as *High Schools That Work, Onward to Excellence, First Things First, America's Choice and Success for All* have been adopted in some Kansas schools. These models are designed to improve literacy skills and strengthen the connection between academic and vocational courses. Many of these programs require greater academic rigor in small learning communities. *Success For All* has demonstrated positive outcomes in reading at the middle school level. There are a number of additional comprehensive models available to schools, yet they have limited to no rigorous research to support their effectiveness. At the same time the efforts of schools to try new approaches indicates a desire to do a better job of meeting students' needs. Post Audit noted that these programs offer clear plans for change, may allow schools additional resources and expertise, and have quality control mechanisms built into them.

The Post Audit report, *K-12 Education: Alternative Models for Organizing Middle and High Schools*, also stated that no matter what efforts are made in individual school districts they are likely to experience difficulty reforming all aspects of their schools, partly because these efforts take several years to implement and tend to be expensive. Convincing all parties involved that it will provide the desired results, particularly when the improvement is not immediate and it demands more training of all staff members, are big stumbling blocks. Such changes have met with moderate support but the fact remains that students, parents and communities are slow in embracing new ways of looking at education. Above all else the report strongly supports the one thing that is happening most often and in every area of our state - recognizing that small learning communities are an effective way to educate the students of Kansas.



Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

President's Message

When visitors come to our schools we show them all of the positive things we do and have. That is a story that deserves to be told. Small schools have so much to be proud of by way of educational accomplishments. As your small schools organization, Schools for Quality Education has chosen to undertake a project to produce a series of fact sheets to tell our story. Poverty has been a key element when considering at risk funding. Our first fact sheet addressed the topic of poverty and some of it's effects on education. We intend to produce several more on other topics. These fact sheets will be hand delivered to Kansas legislators.

What we shy away from is telling of serious needs and any shortcomings we experience. That story must also be told. It is easy for our patrons to get caught up in political rhetoric if that is all they hear about our schools. Large schools enjoy the luxury of a Public Relations person to tell their story. Small schools must add that hat to the many already worn by their administrators. There are so many good things small schools have to offer our communities, specifically and the state in general. I hope, as your school's PR person, you will use these fact sheets as a resource for stories in your school newsletter, letters to the editor and news articles that you may write to tell our story. Please send a copy of what is published from your district to SQE at **124 Bluemont Hall, Kansas State University, 1100 Mid-Campus Drive, Manhattan, KS 66506**. This will help us be aware of what is happening in your district.

Most often we direct our efforts to inform and convince legislators of our positions and needs while overlooking the need to do the same with our patrons. Our legislators have a vast amount of data available to them that paints a picture of our schools' needs. That same information is often harder to get to our patrons in an understandable manner. Often we ask our legislators for their help by supporting bills in our favor. This could be equated to asking them to walk out on a political plank for us. I hope that through the use of these facts sheets, your letters and stories will help us build a bridge that creates understanding with the public of our real needs. I believe it will be easier to ask our legislators to cross that bridge with us rather than walk a plank for us.

Many believed that along with the three year finance package that was passed last year by the Kansas legislature came some breathing room from attacks on small schools and low enrollment weighting. However, there were still bills introduced this year aimed directly at low enrollment weighting. Let us use this time wisely to tell our story. If you have ideas on topics for other fact sheets, we would gladly consider them. I sincerely hope you will join us in this endeavor to create a climate of understanding of why small schools are so vital to our communities and state and why the low enrollment weighting is necessary to keep our schools open.

Steve Watts, SQE President
USD #292 - Wheatland

Special and Sub-Committee Bills

There have been several special committees established this legislative session that address specific areas of interest to leadership. In the senate a K-12 At Risk Task Force has been working since January. The House Education chairman, Clay Aurand, has assigned two subcommittees to further explore ways Kansas can deal with *No Child Left Behind* and the problem of bullying. Each of these sub-committees have met a few times and presented their recommendations to the full committee for approval. As the legislature begins their floor work all of these issues are still active and are likely to be a part of the final 2007 legislation session.

The Senate K-12 Education Task Force is made up of Chairman Nick Jordan (Johnson County), Ruth Teichman (Stafford), Donald Betts (Wyandotte County), Mike Petersen (Sedgwick County), Anthony Hensley (Shawnee County), and Vickie Schmidt (Shawnee County). Senator Teichman is bringing rural concerns forth. The task force has been charged with looking at ways to make a difference in reducing this important population of children. Their focus in January and February has been on how at-risk funding is determined to be sure it reaches the children most in need and on early childhood programs that are likely to reduce the number of at-risk students before they reach kindergarten. The group heard from representatives of the Wichita and Kansas City, Kansas school districts about the many challenges of addressing their high population of needy children. Both stressed the importance of continuing to determine funding based on free lunch recipients since it has been used for over thirty years as a reliable indicator of approximate numbers of needy children at the federal level.

The second phase of the task forces' deliberations has focused on early childhood education. In an effort to pull services and funding streams together, the group heard presentations from Dr. Abby Thurston of Kansas City, Dr. Gayle Stuber of the Department of Education and representatives of the Children's Cabinet. After receiving recommendations from these three stakeholders, a tentative bill was drawn up to establish an office of Early Childhood, which would include an oversight board. The charge of these entities would be to identify early childhood priorities and move toward agency alignment. They would also enforce changes and recommendations to improve the process and procedures within the state departments. The bill proposal has a centralized reporting structure to make it more efficient and effective.

Two house Education sub-committee bills are still alive. The Anti-Bullying Bill (HB2310) has made it through the house and is likely to be worked by the Senate Education Committee in the near future. It requires districts to establish an anti-bullying policy and have an education piece in place to help students and staff understand the various kinds of bullying that may be present in Kansas schools. A character-training program was added. House Bill 2015 was blessed and sent to House Education Budget

Committee just before turnaround. This bill was a blend of Representative Huebert's and Senator Vratil's hope to remove Kansas from the impossible expectations of all children demonstrating AYP. A change from standards to goals leaves schools that receive federal funding in an uncertain position. Although many legislators are concerned about the pressure to reach unattainable levels of proficiency there is also concern that goals may be much like new year's resolutions.

All of these efforts are likely to change in a number of ways and will be interesting to watch throughout the next few months.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

2007 C.A.R.E.S. Award Communities and Rural Education Service Award

The CARES Award is an annual recognition of outstanding efforts to build a strong sense of community between rural school districts and the communities they serve. The winning entry will be a rural school district demonstrating innovative or creative practices that have results in significant contributions to the community. The winning school district will receive a \$5,000 cash award, airfare and hotel accommodations for two to the 2007 NREA Centennial Convention, plus two free registrations to attend the convention.

WHO CAN ENTER: Qualifying rural school districts must be School District Members of the NREA.

School districts are encouraged to self-nominate.

WHAT TO ENTER: Districts should submit eight copies of the C.A.R.E.S. Award Nomination Form and Work Plan (no longer than 3 pages, double spaced), along with any supporting materials, such as brochures, curricula, multimedia, etc. For the 2007 C.A.R.E.S. Award, projects must have been in place during the 2006-2007 school year.

DEADLINES: Nominations will be accepted through **May 31, 2007**. The winning district will be notified by September 15, 2007.

THE JUDGES: Nominations will be evaluated by the NREA Award and Recognition Committee. To evaluate the success of the initiative, the judges will be looking for evidence of careful planning as well as results that indicate the project met its objectives.

WHERE TO SEND ENTRIES: Return eight copies of the Nomination Form and Work Plan to: NREA C.A.R.E.S. Award, 112 Fourth Street, Box 2, Norman, Oklahoma 73019, by **May 31, 2007**. Please note that support materials will not be returned.

For nomination forms, go to www.nrea.net/ and click on 2007 CARE Nomination Form or if you have questions, please contact Bob Mooneyham, NREA Executive Director, at 405-325-7959 or via email at bmooneyham@ou.edu.

Mark Your Calendar

Centennial Convention

"NREA: Crossing Into Our Next Century"

November 12-14, 2007
Hilton Garden Inn Hotel
and

Clarion Convention Center
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



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