



Public Relations Message



The house and senate education leadership committee is made up of Chair Kathe, Umbarger, Downey, Lyon, Oleen, and Taddiken, Representatives Ballard, Beggs, Holland, Mason, Phelps and Powell.

This summer LEPC has been charged to review special education issues including Individualized Education Plans, state and federal laws and due process procedures in the July meeting, how special education programs are delivered in the August meeting and how it is funded in the September meeting. Their recommendations are made available for consideration to the Select Joint Committee on School Finance following the September meeting.

Rod Bieker, legal counsel with the Department of Education presented an overview of laws pertaining to special education, pointing out that parents have more rights under Kansas law than under federal law. Here the law gives school districts an "affirmative duty" to identify children with disabilities. Once a disability has been identified and evaluated using a variety of tools, a team of professionals and the parents meet to determine the appropriate course of action. In cases such as a visual deficiency, addressing the child's need may be as basic as getting eye glasses and no further service is needed.

Deputy Education Commissioner, Dr. Alexa Pochowski and ZoAnn Torrey of the Department of Education shared additional information about IEPs, noting that there were 4.1 million children identified for special education nationwide in 1983-84 compared to 6.6 in the past school year. Of this number 73% are coping with some form of learning disability while 62% of Kansas special education populations have similar learning disabilities.

Pochowski went on to outline the IEP procedure. Although there is no mandated form in our state, a recommended approach would begin with identifying, then evaluating children who may need special education services. If an evaluation that assesses all areas related to suspected disabilities is utilized, the child's eligibility can be determined. At this point the appropriate procedures would be to involve professionals and the parents in a review of the evaluation results and a discussion of whether the child qualifies for special education services as determined by federal law. Parents may challenge these findings. The school district has 30 days to set up an individualized educational plan with services to start soon thereafter. This IEP meeting should involve the parents and all professionals who will be active in the child's education. The parents can involve additional professionals in the IEP meeting. Parental approval is needed before the IEP services can begin. In addition the school must keep the parents posted on their students

progress and involved in re-evaluations of the child's IEP (which must occur a minimum of every 3 years).

Ms. Torrey reviewed the accountability procedure needed to demonstrate compliance to the federal government. Areas assessed include state supervision procedures, accuracy of data and the system for assessing students with disabilities; the extent of parental involvement and compliance with the requirement that free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment be provided; evidence of secondary transition programs and services; and school completion rates. Kansas is deficient in several areas including the transition piece. According to current data collected by the Department of Education, Kansas school districts show that 34% need to improve graduation rates, 22% need to improve drop out rates, 64% need to decrease suspension rates and 31% need to improve their systems for preschoolers with non-disabled peers. All Kansas school districts need to do a better job of working on secondary transition procedures.

Committee members expressed concern regarding the number of special education teachers who leave the field. Reasons given by many of these teachers included; too much paperwork, relationships with parents and lack of administrative support. The Department of Education staff pointed out that much of the required paperwork was a result of federal mandates and their accountability demands.

Further discussion focused on state assessments for special education students. Kansas has been a leader in assessing this population. At present our special education children are tested on the same concepts as the general education population. Their tests may be altered for accommodations, modifications, or there may be an alternative assessment depending on what form of special needs exist for each student and how they're being taught in their classes. Overviews of special education services were provided by a rural coop comprised of West Elk, Elk Valley and Chautauqua County school districts and Wichita School District, the largest district in the state. These two entities outlined the kinds of services they are called upon to provide and the challenges that involves.

Two other topics have been explored by LEPC briefly: Early Childhood Readiness Standards and Personal Financial Literacy. Standards are being established for both under the supervision of the State Board by the Department of Education.

The Early Childhood Readiness Standards are being developed based on guidelines already established by the Kansas Stakeholders Advisory Committee on Early Childhood Education. This group is made up of early childhood personnel

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from the State Departments of Education, Social and Rehabilitation Services and Health and Environment. The Stakeholders group has already developed Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education for Children Birth Through Eight. Current work will make these standards more applicable and operational to the services they provide.

The Personal Financial Literacy program that is being implemented in Kansas schools is intended to be integrated into the current curriculum rather than as a 'stand alone' topic. The legislation passed in 2003 directed the State Board of Education to develop curriculum, materials and guidelines to be used at the local level. Carol Rupe, State Board member and personal financial literacy presenter shared an overview of the program and its' intent with LEPC members. Dr. Diane DeBacker of the Department of Education explained how the curriculum was aligned with mathematics, history, government, economics and geography standards.

Other additional items for study requested for the 2004 LEPC consideration included:

- Scheduling hours at schools that are more convenient to parents (having schools open earlier and later in the day).
- Explanation for high cost of certain special education exceptionalities.
- Report on private schools (including home schools), including the state role and responsibilities with regard to such schools. Also, what state standards may apply to home and private schools.
- Current student tuition policies at Regents institutions and suggestions for changes.
- Extent to which the state universities offer remedial education.
- Involvement of businesses in providing day care programs to employees.
- Policies relating to reporting by private schools of assessment results.

Val DeFever
Public Relations Representative

SQE Annual Meeting and Banquet

November 14, 2004

Holiday Inn Holidome
530 Richards Road
Manhattan, KS

(Detailed meeting and banquet information will be sent to SQE member districts. For reservations and additional information, call 785-532-5886.)

The Hermit Crab Solution

Charleston, WV—The myriad benefits of small schools are well documented—among them higher student achievement and better student behavior, a greater sense of belonging among students, and greater teacher collegiality and satisfaction. Yet, in many rural communities, small schools, once the hub of teaching, learning, socializing and recreation, have become empty shells, abandoned in favor of the purported economic and academic benefits of large, consolidated schools. How can rural America turn the tide of consolidation that is sweeping away its small schools and find ways to keep these centers of learning and community life viable?

In The Hermit Crab Solution, published by AEL, author Barbara Kent Lawrence tackles this important question and offers communities creative alternatives for improving and sustaining their rural school facilities. Much the way the hermit crab survives by finding an existing structure and adapting it to its own use, so can rural communities find and reuse cost-effective accommodations to ensure the survival of their schools.

Lawrence, an educational consultant with a speciality in facilities, makes a case, based on wide research, for keeping rural schools local, and provides a thorough review of the condition of rural school facilities and the obstacles to their improvement. She then presents 11 illustrative cases of rural communities that identified problems, found resources, and developed solutions for keeping their schools nearby. Finally, Lawrence shows readers how to apply lessons learned, including how to identify assets and liabilities, navigate policy issues, and obtain funding. She proves that while finding solutions to facilities issues takes time, effort, persistence, and creativity, crafting a school facility that serves all members of the community and helps sustain its viability is a goal worth pursuing.

Copies of The Hermit Crab Solution are \$18, including shipping and handling. Orders can be placed online at the AEL Web site at www.ael.org, by calling the AEL Distribution Center at 800-624-9120, or by e-mailing distctr@ael.org.



Calendar

26th Annual Rural and Small Schools Conference

November 14-15, 2004

Sponsored by the Center for Rural Education & Small Schools
Manhattan, Kansas
Program and Registration information at <http://coe.ksu.edu/cress/>

96th Annual NREA Convention

October 19-22, 2004

Indianapolis, IN
Program and Registration information at www.nrea.net

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