

School Counselor Legislative Report

Prepared for the Kansas Counseling Association and its members

January 27, 2017

By Bernie Koch, Lobbyist

Education Commissioner Watson tells legislators, “more counselors”

Kansas Education Commissioner Randy Watson this week told legislators looking at school finance that the state needs more school counselors, more school psychologists, and more school social workers. That’s not a new position for Watson, who has been promoting school counseling for some time now.

Watson told the Topeka Capitol-Journal last year he thinks there are not enough school counselors in Kansas. There are currently about 1,100 at Kansas public schools, resulting in a ratio of about 440 students per counselor. Watson thinks a ratio of 200 to 250 students per counselor would be more effective.

The recommend standard by the American School Counselor Association is one counselor for every 250 students. To reach that level, Kansas school districts would have to hire about 840 more.

Speaking to the House of Representatives K-12 Education Budget Committee this week, Watson urged lawmakers to consider school counselors when a new school finance formula is written.

Watson noted that at Atwood, Kansas there is one school counselor for five school districts. That person spends more time on the road than with students.

Here’s an opportunity to put counselors in front of legislators

School counselors will be in the Statehouse in Topeka for School Mental Health Lobby Day on February 9 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

School Mental Health Lobby Day features members of the Kansas School Counselor Association, the Kansas Association of School Psychologists, and the Kansas School Social Workers Association.

The registration and schedule for the event are available at <http://www.kasp.org/event-2415351>.

I will be presenting to the group in the morning and I am working on arranging testimony for the groups before the House and Senate Education Committees. Senate Education Committee Chair Molly Baumgardner (R-Louisburg) has already agreed to putting representatives of the three groups on the agenda for the 1:30 committee meeting that day.

Lawmakers review Governor’s plan to tinker with KPERs

Governor Sam Brownback’s proposal to raise money to plug the state’s current budget hole includes not making some payments to the state’s pension system, KPERs. Legislators are reviewing that proposal and pretty much rejecting it.

The governor has proposed not making the remainder of this fiscal year's payments into KPERS. That save about \$85 million, just to get through the last six months of the year (the fiscal year ends June 30).

Brownback also does not want to repay the \$97 million that was delayed in Fiscal Year 2016 to KPERS. Current law requires a repayment, plus eight percent interest by the end of Fiscal Year 2018. The Governor's proposal eliminates the repayment.

Most legislators seem to be rejecting such one-time fixes, preferring to concentrate on permanently fixing the state's budget problems with by reversing much of the 2012 income tax cuts. The problem with that is that income tax increases will not come into the state until 2018, so the state is facing cuts or other payment delays just to balance the current year budget.

What if we just cut the budget?

This week the House Appropriations Committee took a look at what it would take to balance the current fiscal year budget with just budget cuts, as some have suggested. The answer was not pretty. Education takes a big hit.

It would take 6.95 percent across the board cuts for everything in the general fund. That raises an estimated \$224.5 million.

Here's just some of what that would do:

- K-12 public education would lose \$225 million
- The Department of Aging and Disability Services loses \$25
- Kansas Board of Regents loses \$13 million
- Corrections loses \$11 million
- Kansas Department for Children and Families \$9.4 million

Some school district losses:

- Wichita: \$24 million
- Kansas City, Kansas: \$11.1 million
- Olathe: \$10.8 million
- Shawnee Mission: \$10.6 million
- Blue Valley: \$7.8 million
- Topeka: \$6.3 million
- Lawrence: \$4.7 million
- Garden City: \$3.6 million
- Dodge City: \$3.5 million
- Salina: \$3.1 million
- Manhattan: \$2.5 million
- Hutchinson: \$2.2 million
- Hays: \$1.1 million
- Ottawa: \$1 million

It's basically an \$8.5 percent reduction to each school district in Kansas.

It seems unlikely that such an approach will be taken. Then why bring it up? It may be to scare legislators to think more seriously about tax increases to deal with a \$1.1 billion shortfall over the next three years. It is possible that some education cuts may end up happening.

A lot depends on the Kansas Supreme Court and its long awaited decision on whether Kansas funding is adequate. No one knows for sure when that opinion will be released. However, the Court normally releases opinions on Friday. In the past, the Court has notified legislators and news media in advance when it is about to release a big decision.

Find your legislator

Want to contact your legislator to let them know what you think of any issue?

Here's a quick and easy way to do it. Just go to:

http://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/

Enter your full address, click on the magnifying glass icon. A map of your legislative district and the names and pictures of your state senator and representative will appear.

Click on their name to get contact information.

Bill tracker

Below is a listing of the bills we are tracking for the educator members of the Kansas Counseling Association. You can click on the bill number for more information. It will take you to the Kansas Legislature's web site, where you can read information on the bill.

Many bills will have a Supplemental Note or Fiscal Note. Click on SN or FN to get information in layman's terms.

Bill Number	Bill Sponsor	Bill Subject	Current Status	Last Action
HB 2048	House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee	School district plan addressing child sexual abuse; establishing Erin's law	In House Corrections and Juvenile Justice	01/25/2017 - House Scheduled Hearing in Corrections and Juvenile Justice: Thursday, 2/2, 1:30 PM, Rm 152-S
HB 2078	House Education Committee	Authorizing the reduction or elimination of property tax exemption	In House Education	01/20/2017 - House Scheduled Hearing in Education: Wednesday,

		by a school district		1/25, 3:30 PM, Rm 546-S
HB 2113	House Appropriations Committee	Permanently exempting postsecondary educational institutions from the public buildings law under the personal and family protection act	In House Appropriations	01/20/2017 - House Referred to Appropriations
HB 2138	House Local Government Committee	State fire marshal; school lockdowns; rules and regulations	In House Local Government	01/25/2017 - House Scheduled Final Action in Local Government: Thursday, 2/2, 1:30 PM, Rm 281-N
HB 2142	House K-12 Education Budget Committee	Establishing a unified school district employee health care benefits program	In House K-12 Education Budget	01/25/2017 - House Withdrawn from Education; referred to K-12 Education Budget
HB 2165	House Education Committee	Development and implementation of ethnic studies in schools	In House Education	01/26/2017 - House Referred to Education
HB 2171	House Federal and State Affairs Committee	Student privacy and protection act	In House Federal and State Affairs	01/27/2017 - House Referred to Federal and State Affairs
HB 2179	Steven G. Crum, D-98th	Due process for terminating teachers' contracts	In House Education	01/27/2017 - House Referred to Education

Bernie Koch Government Relations
 berniekoch@yahoo.com