

Talking Points for Public Education

Kansas Association of School Boards – November 9, 2009

Q: *What caused the current budget crisis?*

A: **The national recession and tax cuts caused state receipts to fall, while the costs of education, health care and other programs continued to rise.**

- After the *Montoy* school finance decision, K-12 funding was increased based on cost studies of state requirements. The “three-year plan” for school finance ended in 2009.
- Spending also increased significantly for other state programs, especially for health care costs. From 2002 to 2009, state general fund spending increased about 50 percent.
- From 2002 to 2007, state general fund revenues more than kept up with spending, increasing nearly 50 percent, producing nearly a \$1 billion ending balance in 2007.
- Beginning in 2008, the national recession, coupled with state and federal tax cuts, drove down state revenues from \$5.8 billion in 2007 to \$5.5 billion in 2009.

Q: *What has been the impact on school funding so far?*

A: **Nearly \$170 million cut from K-12 programs so far this year, and expected to increase.**

- In the current year (Fiscal 2010), SGF spending was cut \$550 million; more is expected.
- School district aid was cut about \$170 million in budgets adopted for this year:
 - ✓ \$138 million in base state aid (4.5 percent below last year; 6.1 percent below legislative commitment).
 - ✓ \$25.6 million in capital outlay aid (eliminated program created in response to *Montoy*).
 - ✓ Special education funding at 88 percent, compared to 92 percent commitment in response to *Montoy*.
- K-12 cuts would have been twice as much without \$194 million in federal stimulus aid replacing state aid.
- School cuts were partially offset by \$40 million in other federal stimulus funds (Title I and grants), increased use of local option revenues, fees, etc., in some districts.

Q: *What are the potential future cuts to K-12 education?*

A: **Current cuts could be at least doubled or tripled.**

- Potential additional cuts include:
 - ✓ \$100 million shortfall due to higher enrollments, less local revenues in the current year.
 - ✓ State General Fund revenue estimate lowered \$235 million this year (Fiscal Year 2010).
 - ✓ Projected \$122 million revenue drop for FY 2011 (would require \$263 million more cuts).
 - ✓ Federal stimulus expires in FY 2012 (\$234 million for K-12).

Q: *Why is adequate education funding so important?*

A: **Economic prosperity and quality of life are strengthened by educational attainment, which depends on adequate funding. “You earn what you learn.”**

- Kansas constitution establishes public schools to promote educational improvement, resulting in decades of rising high school and college completion. Educational levels have never been higher.
- Individuals and states with high education levels have higher incomes and prosperity.
- Multiple Kansas legislative studies and results of additional funding show rising educational achievement requires higher levels of investment.

Q: *Why does it cost more to increase educational attainment?*

A: **In the past, it was economically and socially acceptable for many students to leave schools with low skills. Getting *all* students to high standards is much more difficult and expensive.**

- Traditionally, many students excelled; while others dropped out but could support themselves in unskilled jobs. The school system was designed to produce what the old economy needed.
- The new information-based economy needs more high skill jobs and far fewer unskilled jobs.
- Low income, disabled, English Language Learners, and large minority students groups have lagged far behind their peers, and their numbers are growing.

- The No Child Left Behind Act, which is adopted in state requirements, demands schools get *all* these students to reach high academic standards.
- The 2001 Augenblick and Myers study, the *Montoy* court case, and the 2006 Legislative Post Audit study all found that increasing achievement takes more funding, particularly for low income, special education and English Language Learner students.

Q: *What has happened with additional funding for K-12 Education?*

A: **Much of the new funding was targeted to special needs students; districts used those funds to improve educational programs and support; and student achievement increased.**

- Nearly half of increased K-12 state aid went to at-risk and bilingual weightings, transportation aid and special education aid. Over 20 percent went to local option budget state aid to help equalize tax rates; and 12 percent was for KPERS contributions, including compensation for past underfunding.
- School districts increased funding for early childhood programs, at-risk programs and lower class sizes, special education, helping teachers improve, school safety and enhanced technology.
- State assessments increased every year in all subjects; the “achievement gap” for lower performing groups narrowed significantly; more schools reached “standards of excellence,” and national test scores increased.
- Progress for all students is threatened if funding enhancements are cut.

Q: *Can we avoid deep cuts to education without additional revenue?*

A: **Not without far deeper cuts to other important state programs.**

- K-12 education accounts for over half the state general fund budget. Adding all other education (state universities, community colleges and technical college aid, etc.) makes up over two-thirds.
- Balancing the budget without cutting education would mean far deeper cuts to social service and public safety programs, which would ultimately create problems for public schools as well.
- Although school districts have cash balances on hand at the beginning of each fiscal year, most funds are restricted or already committed; or would be one-time funding, at best.

Q: *Can school districts become more “efficient” without harming education quality?*

A: **Kansas schools rank among the best in the nation comparing academic results with dollars spent per pupil. More cuts will harm students, families and local economies.**

- Kansas ranks in the top 10 states on academic measures but spends below the national average per pupil.
- Regionally, Kansas ranks with higher-spending, high achieving states, while lower spending states get worse results. No state spends less and gets better overall student achievement.
- School districts spend most of their revenue on employees, goods and services – areas that must be cut if spending is reduced, and would compound state and local economic distress.

Q: *Would higher taxes hurt the Kansas economy?*

A: **Education and other public services are more important to prosperity than low taxes.**

- Kansas ranks in the middle of national tax rankings.
- The Kansas tax burden has changed little in decades (although the increasing volume of tax exemptions may have shifted the burden among taxpayers).
- Educational attainment matters far more than tax rates for state income levels.

What Can You Do?

School Boards have some control over local budgets and choices of programs, but your State Legislators have the real power to provide our children with the funding to provide high quality educational opportunities. Unfortunately, the local school board is currently in a reactive mode and has to find ways to make our budgets balance.

We've made significant cuts the last two years and are being forced to continue to "slash and burn" valuable programs in our schools.

When your state legislators know that their decisions will effect your vote in the next election, you will have as much power as we do to effect positive change for not only your child, but for the community's children. Old-fashioned personal letters seem to get the most attention from our legislators. The more letters we can generate to the legislators from parents and grandparents, the more likely we will get what we want ... a quality education for all children.

Our Bluestem Representatives:

Ty Masterson, State Senator
785-296-7388

The Honorable Ty Masterson
State Capitol
Capitol Office 541-E
Topeka, KS 66612

David Crum, State Representative
785-296-6014

The Honorable David Crum
State Capitol
Capitol Office 165-W
Topeka, KS 66612

Ed Trimmer, State Representative
785-296-7122

The Honorable Ed Trimmer
State Capitol
Capitol Office DSOB
Topeka, KS 66612

MORE THOUGHTS ON 4-DAY WEEKS

Childcare is often cited as a concern for parents who work outside of the home.

- However, many parents say that it is easier to find a babysitter for one day per week rather than a few hours every day.
- A 4-Day school week has actually been cited as a solution to the “latchkey” issue.
- Additional summer day care will still be needed with a shortened 5-day schedule, concentrating the cost of that care in the summer months rather than spreading it out through the year.

There is little research available on the practice of a 4-Day school week and its affects on student achievement.

- Many districts report an increase in actual instructional time due to less interference from athletics, doctor and dentist appointments.
- It is essential that teachers make adjustments to instructional practices and timelines in order to avoid student achievement being affected negatively. The instructional change will require additional staff development.
- Concerns have been expressed by some that students in need of more frequent reinforcement have trouble with continuity of learning with the three-day weekend.

Most districts make the transition to a 4-Day School Week for financial reasons but soon recognize other advantages and benefits that they did not anticipate:

- Student dropout rates decline.
- Student disciplinary referrals decrease.
- Student achievement is generally not affected either positively or negatively.
- Student and teacher attendance improves.
- Participation in activities tends to increase.
- Students and teachers benefit from less interrupted class time as a result of longer class periods and fewer transitions at all grade levels. This increases the efficiency of instruction.
- Students and teachers share more positive attitudes about school. Consequently, there is a marked improvement in school morale.
- School faculty has more time for quality staff development (often the day off is used for this purpose).
- There is more time for participation in extracurricular activities and for personal business, such as doctor appointments.
- The district has savings on utility bills, substitute teacher pay, school buses, and building wear and tear.
- Schools can make up school days missed due to inclement weather on what would have been the fifth school day instead of at the end of the school year.
- Schools experience fewer distractions; learning is broken up less by athletic events or other school activities.

Some concerns associated with 4-Day week:

- Child care issues: While some parents like the 4-day week because they prefer having to find good child care one day a week, others dislike it for the same reason and prefer to arrange for child care in smaller increments of time.
- There is often concern as to how primary students will respond to such a long school day. As a result, many schools structure the day so the afternoon is composed of less academic work than the morning, thus allowing students to have some “down time”.
- School reform movement: Some educators are concerned that the 4-day school week may appear to be inconsistent with the new emphasis for more time in school.
- The 4-Day school week will take more of the local community commitment than other schedule options as it can affect daily community routines.
- Students will get on buses earlier in the morning and arrive at home later in the evening with a 4-day week.
- Students will have a longer time between breakfast and lunch with the longer school day.

Districts typically report a cost savings after transferring to a 4-Day School Week but also report that the savings are not substantial.

- Most cost savings come as a result of decreased work schedules for Classified Staff who work on an hourly basis.

Transportation: It has been reported that transportation costs can be reduced by about 20%.

- To realize these savings, a district must severely

restrict or eliminate transportation for activities or programs on non-school days.

- Savings come from fuel, oil, and salaries for school bus drivers.
- Capital, insurance, maintenance and administrative costs remain consistent.

Food Service Programs: If districts are subsidizing the food service program from the general fund, a 20% savings has been reported.

- Certain fixed costs are not reduced (Note: Bluestem schools do subsidize food service from the general fund)

A full 20% reduction in these areas for many districts that have made the transition results in approximately 1 to 2% savings in the overall budget. (This would be \$50,000 to \$100,000 for Bluestem Schools)

Utilities:

- If buildings are actually closed and placed on weekend cycle, a savings can be realized. (Note – All USD 205 buildings have quality HVAC setback control systems.)
- However, common practice is for some buildings to be open for extra activities and for staff use.

Staff:

- Teachers and administrators typically receive the same annual salary.
- Savings reported usually can be attributed to reduction in hours worked for hourly employees tied directly to the school day, such as aides, cooks, paraprofessionals and bus drivers.

- Districts often see savings from a decrease in the need for substitute teachers due to better staff attendance.

Opportunity for a future 5th Day Academy (enrichment and remediation) and Internships to extend learning opportunities. (Virtual and Face to Face)

Opportunity for staff or student entrepreneurs to develop 5th day childcare options (some as community service for low-income parents?)

A 4-day a week school year would most closely mirror the KSHSAA annual calendar.

"The four-day school week was probably one of those few decisions made in education in the name of money that actually ended up having educational benefits in terms of the academic performance of kids," says **Joyce Ley**, director of the Rural Education Program at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Ore. "Schools end up operating more efficiently and they can maintain their programs, even when their resources have been reduced. It's been a good choice."