

# **CHALLENGES FOR KANSAS EDUCATION**

## **by Dr. Walt Chappell – (316) 838-7900**

K-12 schools in Kansas are receiving \$2.5 billion more per year to teach the same number of students taught 10 years ago. However, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), plus the ACT and SAT college admissions tests all show that achievement scores for Kansas students have not improved. In fact, only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our 8<sup>th</sup> grade students are proficient in reading or math. Just 26% of high school students have ACT scores high enough to be admitted to universities. Many who do attend need remediation and/or flunk out with huge debts and no college degree.

It is time to ask some serious questions and find solutions which are not based on spending an increased amount of tax dollars each and every year. We must provide our students with the employable skills they need to compete for jobs in the global economy. Educators need to do a better job with the 52% of dollars already provided by State taxpayers instead of always demanding more.

Here are some of the challenges which must be faced before quality education can be achieved.

- 1) The current State **school finance formula** does not assure an equal educational opportunity for each student. The Legislature needs to pass a new formula based on the resources required to teach the students attending each school. Line-item, school district budgets hide and waste money. Too often, tax dollars do not reach the classroom.
- 2) Teachers receive **pay raises** based on the number of years taught and credit hours of college courses completed—not on how well students learn. Since 80% of the cost of educating students is in salaries, compensation must be based on teaching performance.
- 3) Giving **teachers tenure** after only three years instead of basing their continued employment on student achievement does not reward excellence. No other sector of society has such job security. It is time to change the teacher tenure laws in Kansas.
- 4) The average **drop-out rate** in Kansas is 25%. For Black and Hispanic males, 30-50% drop-out, depending on the school. Most of these students are not dumb. In fact, 84% say they are simply bored with what they are forced to learn. We must teach relevant knowledge and job skills so students choose to come to school each day.
- 5) Our students must learn **financial literacy** to be able to manage the money they will earn. Focusing on State assessments for reading and math without teaching students personal finance is setting them and our Nation up for failure.
- 6) There are too many taxing units in Kansas. With 85% of the 293 school districts less than 2000 students, taxes are higher than necessary. Currently, \$175 million dollars per year are taken out of the State General Fund each year to subsidize school districts from 1,600 down to less than 100 students. Paying tiny districts to stay small is a huge waste of tax dollars. We can save \$300 million per year by **redrawing school district boundaries** and put those funds into vocational programs to teach students employable skills.

- 7) The cost of **teaching the children of illegal aliens** is becoming enormous. Currently, \$42 million in State tax dollars per year goes to pay for English language programs, plus the Federal Title I funds, free school lunches, social workers and Special Education programs. It has been estimated that the total cost to teach students of illegals in Kansas is \$256 million/year. It is time to charge at least a \$1,000 "fee for service" to teach any parent's child who cannot document to the school district that they are in the USA legally.
- 8) We do not have enough **science, math or vocational teachers**. It is time to revise the teacher certification requirements to allow people with real world, work experience in these practical, technical skills to teach our middle and high school students.
- 9) **Classroom disruptions, bullying and school violence** is getting totally out of hand in some schools. The number of student violent acts across Kansas increased from 6,375 to 8,720 between 2008 and 2009. When classrooms are disrupted by unruly students, the other students cannot learn and teachers cannot teach. We must work with parents to help bring discipline back to our schools. Millions of dollars are being wasted trying to control disruptive students rather than teaching what they need to learn to get a job.
- 10) One size does not fit all. Only 20% of high school graduates actually earn a 4 year college degree. The other 80% need to learn employable skills while they are still in high school. This means that **graduation requirements** should allow **two different tracks** to earn a high school diploma. Schools also need to work with business and industry to teach relevant skills and knowledge. Specific industry recognized certificates can be earned and issued while students are still in high school so they are employable after graduation rather than forcing them to wait and take on huge debt to go for post-secondary training.

To meet these challenges and improve our K-12 schools will require the joint effort of many dedicated and persistent people. Leaders from business and industry, Legislators, educators, parents and child advocates must now step forward. Since Kansas is part of the global economy, the rest of the world is not waiting on us to compete for jobs. Please work together to implement these and other education reforms.

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Dr. Chappell is an elected member of the Kansas State Board of Education representing Wichita, Kansas. However, the challenges mentioned and suggestions he has made have not been discussed or voted on by the State Board.

For further information, please feel free to phone Dr. Chappell at **(316)838-7900** or send an email to **chappellhq@chappell4ksboe.com**. Additional data and documents are posted on his website at **http://www.chappell4ksboe.com**. Your questions and suggestions are always welcomed.

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