

MINUTES

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S ISSUES

November 10, 2008

Room 545-N—Statehouse

Members Present

Senator Julia Lynn, Chairperson
Representative Mike Kiegerl, Vice-Chairperson
Senator David Haley
Senator Laura Kelly
Senator Susan Wagle
Representative Bill Otto

Members Not Present

Representative Marti Crow
Representative Brenda Landwehr
Representative Roger Reitz
Representative Sue Storm

Staff Present

Martha Dorsey, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Kelly Navinsky-Wenzl, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Reed Holwegner, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Renaee Jefferies, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Nobuko Folmsbee, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Theresa Kiernan, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Florence Deeter, Committee Secretary

Conferees

Dr. Erin Dugan, Director of Special Education, Olathe School District-USD 233
Sue Denny, Executive Director of Student Services, Blue Valley-USD 229
Deb Haltom, Director of Special Education, Shawnee Mission School District, USD
512
Joan Johnson, Coordinator for Autism, Shawnee Mission School District-USD 512
Colleen Riley, Director of Special Education Services, Kansas Department of
Education
Lee Stickle, Co-director of the Kansas Instructional Support Network
Dr. Bill Craig, Chairman, Kansas Autism Task Force
Dr. Mike Wasmer, Member, Kansas Autism Task Force
Jeanie Zortman, Dodge City, Parent of Child with Autism
Louise Heinz, Lawrence, Parent of Child with Autism
Aimee Keohane, Gardner, Parent of Child with Autism

Others Attending

See attached list.

Monday, November 10 Morning Session

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. The Chairperson welcomed Committee members and guests and outlined the specific topic of the day—a look at how children with autism are performing in the public school setting. She informed members the task force is seeking to be renewed in 2009.

Staff member Martha Dorsey provided an overview of the Committee's charge. The topic of child care licensing was referred by the Legislative Coordinating Committee. In addition, KSA 46-3001, as amended by 2008 SB 81 (the Committee's enabling law), allows the Committee to address the topics deemed appropriate by the Committee. (Attachments 1 and 2).

Dr. Erin Dugan, Director of Special Education, Olathe School District-USD 233, presented data on how students are served in the regular classroom (Attachment 3). Dr. Dugan stated that students diagnosed with autism can participate in the educational process within the regular classroom when modifications are implemented. Center-based educational programs, classes with only six students who need intensive direction, and special day schools are all avenues to assist in the educational experiences for these students. She noted the list of quality service providers for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the Olathe district and then commented on the best practices agenda which provides the basis of evidence-based curriculum used in educating children with autism. She said that ongoing training of staff, teachers, providers, consultants and instructional aides provides expertise in contributing to the success of the students. Dr. Dugan stated that growth and funding are ongoing challenges. With 300 students in the district currently identified with ASD, the need for additional funding is a priority in order to continue the quality of education needed.

Dr. Dugan introduced a parent, Mr. Adam Pitts, whose son William is a student in the Olathe School District. Mr. Pitts expressed gratitude for his experience with the teams in relation to planning programs for William. He was provided with tuition-free services, a speech pathologist, occupational therapy and full-time paraprofessional support. The program has given William an opportunity to advance in social and behavioral skills; however, he indicated that more can be accomplished with additional therapy. Problematic is the lack of assistance from his insurance company, which is unwilling to pay for any additional services. Neuro Feedback Therapy and ADA therapy costs \$1,000 per week. Mr. Pitts concluded his remarks by stating that parents are bound by what insurance companies will pay for services, and the companies should be accountable for more assistance. He said it has been proven that early diagnosis of ASD and intervention will help to reduce the amount of money needed by school districts which could allow a possible reduction of state funding in the future.

Sue Denny, Executive Director of Student Services, Blue Valley-USD 229, provided data of the service delivery models for students with ASD (Attachment 4). She said in the regular classroom the environment is set up with specific learning styles in place for each student, and, with frequent team meetings and communication with parents, ASD students are better equipped to progress in their education.

Ms. Denny introduced Lisa Bingham, Service Delivery Consultant with the Blue Valley School District, who further commented on the programs designed for students with Asperger's syndrome (see page 3 of [Attachment 4](#)). She explained that some people with Asperger's syndrome are dually diagnosed as gifted students and the more challenged students are placed in a center-based program entitled Navigators. Ms. Bingham said the class has a limit of five to eight students per classroom.

Ms. Bingham outlined the procedures used for providing ongoing training for staff. She said that classes are offered through Baker University, and professional development sessions are held each Friday for on-the-job training. She indicated the primary goal is retention of qualified staff.

Ms. Denny read a letter from Dr. David and Kirsten Sneid, founders of the local Autism Society of American Chapter in Johnson County, and parents of two ASD boys ([Attachment 5](#)). The Committee then viewed a video of the programs being conducted in Blue Valley School District.

Ms. Denny responded to questions by stating the Navigator Program available post-high school is now being offered at the high school level for students. She said the transitional services are modified somewhat to provide support. Ms. Denny said that cooperation and involvement with technical schools has proved successful for many students. She also commented on collaboration with other school districts and noted that even out-of-state superintendents and staff have visited the programs offered in Johnson County.

Deb Haltom, Director of Special Education, and Joan Johnson, Coordinator for Autism, Shawnee Mission School District-USD 512, provided information relative to the Shawnee Mission district (SHMD) ([Attachment 6](#)). Ms. Haltom cited pertinent statistics, showing about ten percent of the student population is diagnosed with autism. She commented on the district's position statement, saying that autism is not a one-size-fits-all curriculum, rather a mission of tailoring education to meet the academic needs of individuals. Ms. Haltom emphasized the importance of involving parents in team meetings for planning, problem solving and providing recognition of the success demonstrated by their child with ASD.

Ms. Joan Johnson explained that SHMD has a long history of progress in providing services for ASD students. She indicated that a primary goal is to partner with community agencies in planning for post-high school success. One innovative procedure in place is an e-Brief publication available each month on their website to provide parents with ideas and activities they can incorporate into daily family lifestyles. She said the website is open to anyone nationwide and contains valuable information and resources.

Ms. Johnson addressed the question of disruptive students by saying a variety of procedures are used: State requirements are in place with guidelines for time out, moving a student away from the disruptive situation, teaching a skill for working through the difficulty, and looking for ways to provide positive support and minimize the disruptive behavior. She said the goal is to respond with the least restrictive action.

Colleen Riley, Director of Special Education Services, Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), gave an overview of special education services for children from age three to twenty-one ([Attachment 7](#)). She indicated that KSDE teams work with Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, along with institutes of higher learning to provide education and on-going training for persons working with the ASD population. Ms. Riley commented on the statistics revealing the number of students with disabilities residing in Kansas. She spoke of grant-funding which is available to school districts through KSDE.

Lee Stickle, Co-director of the Kansas Instructional Support Network (KISN), provided an overview of the various aspects of services to ASD children across Kansas ([Attachment 8](#)). She said that during the past four years, KISN, in conjunction with state universities, has provided professional training by utilizing the ITV Network; during the past year more than 300 persons participated in various sessions.

Ms. Stickle outlined the initiatives KISN is undertaking and addressed the challenges facing the agency. She noted the areas of progress made in achieving goals by working with other members and organizations in Kansas. She responded to members' questions, stating that persons with a bachelor's degree are able to complete certification of special education requirements in a fifteen-hour program, completion of which is possible within one year. She said a scholarship program has not been funded; however, some school districts pay to have its staff use the ITV Network for professional development. Ms. Stickle responded to the challenge of how to disseminate information to rural and suburban areas by stating that cooperation among all agencies is imperative in order to provide information and services to those in need. She concluded her remarks by saying that early intervention is imperative and proves to be successful for children diagnosed with ASD.

Afternoon Session

Dr. Bill Craig, Chairman, Kansas Autism Task Force (KATF), provided an updated report on a recommended study and hearings on issues related to the needs and services of persons with autism ([Attachment 9](#)). He commented on the findings and activities of the Task Force and noted the current barriers families experience in attaining the best education for their autistic child. Dr. Craig said the KATF final report is to be given to the Legislative Education Planning Committee. He noted the recommendations of the Task Force and indicated that extension through 2009 would enable the task force to complete its work.

Dr. Craig provided additional comments and testimony regarding the necessity of early diagnosis and intervention in relation to effectively educating children with ASD ([Attachment 10](#)). He responded to questions from members, stating that catastrophic state aid is available if needs for services exceed a statutory maximum dollar amount. Dr. Craig said that a priority for the legislative action would be to match any federal funding monies, provide insurance, and increase the \$10,000 per child autism waiver.

Dr. Mike Wasmer, Member, Kansas Autism Task Force, and the father of a child with ASD, provided personal testimony in support of the programs available in Blue Valley ([Attachment 11](#)).

Jeanie Zortman, Dodge City, a parent of a child with autism, presented testimony of her involvement with school districts in rural Kansas ([Attachment 12](#)). She addressed concerns regarding the lack of services, underpayment of staff and limited funds for students with ASD. Ms. Zortman said that families support each other and provide respite care on an exchange basis; some families depend entirely on elder members when the need arises. She strongly advocated for early diagnosis and intervention for children with ASD.

Louise Heinz, Lawrence, a parent of a child with autism, provided testimony with statistics on the number of students in Lawrence schools who are diagnosed with ASD. ([Attachment 13](#)). Her information included a figure showing the number has doubled in the past five years. She said parents in the school district became confused with the transition from *tiny-k* to an evidenced-based program for children with ASD primarily because of minimal communication and appropriate services. She concluded her remarks by saying that untreated children with ASD become very expensive

adults—up to \$3.5 million in services and care. She recommended that the autism waiting list be abolished, that additional funding for the autism waiver be a priority, and that Kate’s law, providing insurance be mandated, be enacted.

In answer to a question, Ms. Heinz said that families must hire personal paraprofessional staff to assist their children since the district provides only one hour per week of special education services.

Aimee Keohane, Gardner, a parent of a child with autism, provided a detailed scenario of her son, Connor, and his experiences in the school district at Gardner-Edgerton, USD 231 (Attachment 14). She reported eventually having to obtain legal assistance for her son in connection with his educational experiences in the district. Ms. Keohane said that circumstances necessitated his attendance in another district.

Representative Kiegerl requested it be noted for the record the distinctive differences spoken of by the testimonies from parents in the Olathe School District, the Lawrence School District, and the Gardner-Edgerton School District. He asked that the letter from Larry and Gayla Ward telling their son John’s story be included as testimony (Attachment 15).

Senator Lynn thanked those who participated in the meeting. She said the next meeting will include a discussion on the issue of transition from high school to adulthood for students with ASD. Child care licensing also will be addressed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for December 9, 2008.

Prepared by Florence Deeter
Edited by Martha Dorsey

Approved by Committee on:

December 9, 2008
(Date)