

First in Education, the Kansas Way

Kansas Association of School Boards, January 29, 2012

What Kansans and Their School Boards Believe about Improving Education

Kansas Constitution, Kansas Conversation and Public Opinion Survey

The foundation of public education in Kansas is the state constitution. The current education article was adopted by the people of Kansas in 1966. It commits the state to improving education through a system of public schools established by the Legislature, with suitable finance provided by the Legislature, under the management of locally elected school boards and with general supervision by an elected state board.

To determine what the people of Kansas believe about improving education today, KASB initiated the Kansas Conversation in the Spring of 2011. As of August, over 75 school districts representing nearly 100 Kansas communities participated in community conversations, involved nearly 3,000 people. Responses were analyzed by a team of university professors. In addition, in February of 2011, the firm Patron Insight polled 500 Kansans on their attitudes about education.

Based on this research, KASB developed and adopted a plan for continuing to improve our state's educational system and outcomes. The following document aligns the priority issues identified in that resolution with appropriate sections of the education article of the Constitution and responses from the Kansas Conversation, and opinion poll. Separate documents present research about the progress and challenges of educational improvement.

KASB wants Kansas to be first in the nation in education, the Kansas way: based on the Kansas constitution, Kansas values and doing what works for Kansas.

Adopted by the KASB Delegate Assembly, December 3, 2011

Resolution 1: First in Education, the Kansas Way

The people of Kansas through their constitution seek to continually improve education by establishing public schools led by local school boards elected from their community, under the general supervision of an elected State Board, with suitable finance provided by the Legislature. Under this system, Kansas ranks seventh in the nation on 11 key educational outcomes. KASB proposes that Kansas strive to be first in the nation in education by strengthening our Kansas system as follows:

1. Improving Education: Continue to improve the high-ranking achievement levels of Kansas students.

The Kansas Constitution says:

Article 6.1. The legislature shall provide for intellectual, educational, vocational and scientific improvement by establishing and maintaining public schools, educational institutions and related activities which may be organized and changed in such manner as may be provided by law.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What are schools currently doing to improve education?

- Overwhelmingly positive about their local schools.
- Schools are providing a safe, caring, nurturing environment for the students served.
- Maintaining a high quality education system is essential. Programs being offered in schools are high quality and judged to provide the necessary depth and breadth.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

- 82% gave local school districts an “A” or “B.” (Q.4)
- 70% gave schools in Kansas overall an “A” or “B.” (Q.5)
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed that school districts in Kansas are safe places for students and staff. (Q.15)
- 79% agreed or strongly agreed that students who graduate from Kansas public schools are prepared to be good citizens (Q.10)

New accreditation and accountability. Move from the current narrow focus on annual reading and math tests to more meaningful assessment of student growth and 21st century skills.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools add to improve education?

- Best practice assessment procedures; interest in the implementation of individual student growth models for student promotion, school accreditation, and teacher evaluation.

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- Current assessment practices viewed as burdensome, time consuming, invalid, and expensive.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is viewed very negatively and respondents advocated repeal or waiver of the requirements as currently written.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

No questions asked.

Broader curriculum. Maintain the current breadth of courses and activities and expand focus to include college preparation, career education, fine arts and development of essential life skills.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What are schools currently doing to improve education?

- Kansas schools currently offer a comprehensive curriculum. Comments mention importance of fine arts programs and career and technical education.

What should schools add to improve education?

- Add comprehensive K-12 career education programs. Every student should exit high school ready for “their next step in life,” whether college, technical college, military, work-force, etc.
- Increase funding for non-tested curricular areas of fine arts, performing arts, technology, and career education.
- Many comments in regard to curriculum improvement focused on making the curriculum more relevant and rigorous.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

- 76% agreed or strongly agreed that students who graduate from Kansas public schools are ready for the next phase of their lives – whether that’s college, vocational training or getting a job. (Q.9)
- 81% agreed or strongly agreed that teaching students technical and vocational skills in the upper grades should be as much a priority as other subjects. (Q. 23)
- 85% agreed or strongly agreed that extra-curricular activities, such as sports, band and debate, are an important part of an overall education. (Q.18)
- 48% agreed or strongly agreed that students who graduate from Kansas public schools are prepared for basic life skills, such as managing their own money. (Q.11)

37% agreed or strongly agreed that enough time is spent in school days on the basics, like English, science, social studies and math. (Q. 19)

41% agreed or strongly agreed that enough time is spent in school these days on developing skills, such as working in teams, problem solving and communications. (Q. 20)

Individual student focus. Strengthen support programs based on individual student needs, beginning with early childhood and continuing through preparation of all students for success beyond high school.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools add to improve education?

- A high percentage of comments on different subjects indicated schools are currently trying to help all students, but should do more to ensure that all students do succeed.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

79% agreed or strongly agreed that school districts in Kansas have high expectations for their students. (Q. 17)

86% agreed or strongly agreed that all students have the ability to learn, and it's up to school districts to determine how to help each one learn and be successful. (Q. 12)

Effective educators. Improve educator training, licensure, and retention policies using performance-based evaluation and continuing professional development while providing appropriate protections and benefits, including the state retirement system.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools add to improve education?

- State should provide funds to attract, train, and retain quality school personnel. Concern that current funding is not high enough to accomplish this goal.
- Significant support for improving employee accountability measures.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

No questions asked.

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- End the current teacher tenure system.

Public engagement. Increase public understanding of educational issues and support for improvement.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What are schools currently doing to improve education?

- Schools currently have many partnership initiatives with parents, the community, and businesses.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

No questions asked.

What should schools add to improve education?

- Respondents view new partnerships as an important aspect of school improvement.

2. Suitable Finance: Provide constitutionally suitable funding for the state's educational interests.

Kansas Constitution says:

Article 6.6 (b). The legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state.

State educational interests. Fund as state responsibility all educational interests as defined by requirements of the Legislature, State Board of Education and federal government, including educational outcomes.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools add to improve education?

- Current funding is hindering school improvement efforts.
- All mandated programs should be totally funded by the mandating agency or drop the mandate for the local school district.
- Add support for elective, non-tested curricular areas.

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- Stop cutting staff and increasing class size. Concerns about funding were found across all areas of response.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

83% agreed or strongly agreed that protecting funding for public education should be one of the highest priorities when decisions are made by state government. (Q. 8)

Funding Equity. Balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What are schools currently doing to improve education?

- Local school board's efforts to provide quality up-to-date facilities and equipment.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

94% agreed or strongly agreed that generally speaking, all students should have access to equal educational opportunities, no matter where they live in Kansas. (Q.13)

95% agreed or strongly agreed that keeping school buildings and classroom technology up-to-date is important. (Q.16)

At-Risk Students. Provide funding that recognizes the impact of economic disadvantage and other factors in student success, and does not punish students and schools for improving outcomes.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What are schools currently doing to improve education?

- Special examples to help students with learning deficits include:
 - At risk programs, gifted education, counseling.
 - Extra instructional time for students with identified learning deficits.
 - Quality staff development.
 - Nurses, para-educators, counselors, social workers, transition specialists, occupational and physical therapists, and instructional coaches.
 - Supplemental programs such as student discipline, transportation, food service, custodians, building maintenance, and school resource officers.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

88% agreed or strongly agreed that generally speaking, all students should have access to equal educational opportunities, no matter what their strengths and weakness in the classroom may be. (Q.14)

Tax Policy. Improve understanding of the impact of narrowing the state tax base, and support a tax system that balances economic development with constitutionally suitable education funding.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

Not discussed.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

89% agreed or strongly agreed that public education is worth the investment of tax dollars. (Q.7)

3. Local Leadership: Strengthen the role of parents and communities to promote flexibility and innovation in school management and improvement through their locally elected school boards.

What the Kansas Constitution says:

Article. 6.5. Local public schools under the general supervision of the state board of education shall be maintained, developed and operated by locally elected boards.

Local decision-making. Support local choices in education policy and use of funding unless the school persistently fails to demonstrate improvement.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- State should stop reducing local control.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

89% agreed or strongly agreed that decisions about what's best for local school districts should be made by local school boards, rather than at the state level. (Q.6)

State mandates. Review state mandates and identify requirements for possible repeal.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- Unfunded mandates from the Federal and State levels of government were particularly unpopular and should be eliminated.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

No questions asked.

Innovation. Promote flexibility under supervision of local boards, rather than outside of local accountability.

Kansas Conversation participants said:

What should schools add to improve education?

- Increase flexibility in legislation, rules, regulations, policies, and programs.
- Flexibility in policy and programs is best provided at the local level.

Patron Insight Poll respondents said:

What should schools stop doing to improve education?

- Discontinue the current nine month agrarian calendar and replace with year-round schooling to increase student achievement.

26% agreed or strongly agreed that the length of the school year in Kansas should be longer, to give students more time in the classroom. (Q. 22)

State Supervision. Maintain an independent State Board of Education, directly accountable to voters, with authority over the Commissioner and Department of Education for general supervision of schools.

What the Kansas Constitution says:

Article 6.2 (a). The legislature shall provide for a state board of education which shall have general supervision of public schools...(and)... shall appoint a commissioner of education who shall serve...as its executive officer.

Public funding and non-public education. No public funding should be provided to private institutions with accountability under local school boards.

What the Kansas Constitution says:

Article 6.6 (c). No religious sect or sects shall control any part of the public educational funds.

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