

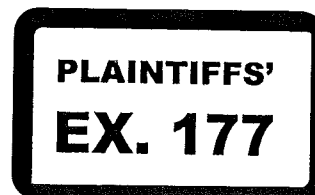
TESTIMONY ON THE 2010 COMMISSION REPORT

I am Rochelle Chronister and for the past four years I have been the chairman of the Kansas 2010 Commission which the legislature created partly as a result of the loss of the school finance case in 2005. One of the court findings in the case was that there was no independent body in Kansas looking at the education system and providing input on what was needed since the study by Augenblick and Myers in the 1980's produced a report saying Kansas was badly underfunding its public education system. That study was authorized and funded by the Kansas legislature which immediately ignored the findings because they didn't want to deal with the potential costs. In 2005 the legislature created the 2010 Commission (so named because it was set to expire in 5 years in December 2010) to provide the independent study group the court felt was missing. The Commission was given very broad powers to go anywhere, examine all parts of public education in the state and given a post audit team to supervise.

2010 has fulfilled many of its responsibilities by visiting schools all across Kansas. We have been in small schools, large schools and those in-between. We went to Shawnee Mission, Wyandotte high school, Baxter Springs, Galena, Junction City, Kearney County, Wichita and Colby. We have seen exemplary programs and mediocre ones, discussed everything from 0-3 early childhood programs to teaching Chinese. As a result of those four years I can stand before you today and report Kansas has one of the best systems of public education in the country and if we do not act now it could be destroyed.

Our country has been hit by hard by the economic times and Kansas is no exception. Revenues to state government are down significantly. Cuts to the budget of public education have been draconian and many schools are being forced to reduce the very programs that helped children to succeed in school.

It is no longer a guessing game as to why many of our children have failed in school and how we can help them. We have put into place a myriad of strategies that will help them succeed and they are working! Our scores in math and reading



are gaining ground every year and the children who are gaining the most are those who would have failed in the past-those who we call "at risk". What are these successful programs? We could call it an 8 point program for school success.

- Early childhood education, including but not limited to 4 year old preschool and all day kindergarten, Parents as Teachers, tiny K, Head Start and Early Head Start;
- Before and after school tutoring and support programs;
- At-risk funding and programs including small class sizes and more paraprofessionals;
- Staff development including mentoring programs for new teachers;
- Leadership academies, especially for principals who must be the educational leaders of their schools, not just the disciplinarians;
- Highly qualified teachers
- Multi-year funding of schools in order to provide for good long-range planning opportunities.

Finally, full funding of the school finance formula.

These are proven strategies that work for the success of our children.

There are those who would argue that the American public school system is a failure, and they point to international testing to back up their claims. What they do not take into account is the fact that the American system of education is for ALL children-not just the favored few in the top 15-20% as happens in nearly all other countries. We are a nation of immigrants and the road to success has been through education of ALL of our children. We believe that EVERY child deserves to

be educated in order to have a chance to fulfill their potential. If you have only the top 15-20% of American children take those same tests you will find we rank at or near the top.

Next, let's take a look at what I call "urban myths" about Kansas", or the Big Lie.

- 1) Kansas is a high tax state. Actually Kansas ranks 23rd in the nation on state AND local tax collections as a percent of personal income. From 1930 until 2000 the percentage is steady and ranges between 10.5 and 12% over those 70 years'
- 2) Tax policy drives prosperity. Johnson County has been an excellent example of this myth in our state. The education system in the county has drawn people to live there while they work in Missouri and surrounding areas. The county has one of the highest income levels in the country and consistently votes to raise their taxes in order to improve their schools. Low taxes don't draw people to this county, but an excellent school system does.
- 3) A formal education no longer is worth what it costs. The relationship between education and income in the years between 1973 and 2007 shows that the inflation-adjusted income for a high school dropout with no additional training increased just 3.3% while those with some postsecondary training increased 15.8% and those with a college degree went up 36.3%. High income jobs require good basic skills as well as postsecondary training. The high quality of our workforce will draw good jobs to Kansas.
- 4) Next myth -Kansas schools do not spend their educational dollars efficiently. Kansas ranks in the top 10 states on educational outcome testing, but is far below the national average in cost per pupil. Kansas spent \$8392 / pupil where the national average for the top ten states is \$10,786-a \$2400 difference.

- 5) Money doesn't really matter in improving education. A Legislative Post Audit team in January of 2006 reported that there is a strong association between the amount districts spend and the outcomes they achieve. For every 1% increase in district performance outcomes there was an associated 0.83% increase in spending-almost a one-to-one relationship.
- 6) School budgets have far outstripped the ability of Kansans to pay for their children's education. Since 1975 school district operating budgets have increased over 700%, but the per capita income of Kansans has increased over 800%. State aid has increased at a higher percentage, but that was a deliberate decision of the legislature in order to reduce local school property tax burdens.

Here's something that isn't a myth – the Kansas legislature has given over a Billion dollars in tax breaks in the last few years.

The evidence is clear – Kansans are getting a bargain for the education of their children through public education and the future of this state is dependent on continuing the support of our schools, but today the ability of those schools to support the high level of public education is threatened.

Don't be fooled by statements such as "everyone needs to share the pain" or "we have to starve the Beast" of government. "The Beast" is the education of our children and starving it means larger classes (30 kids instead of 21) and consolidation of smaller school districts, along with the loss of exemplary programs.

The 2010 Commission made these recommendations:

1. The Kansas legislature should refocus its revenue and funding priorities to make education Priority Number One.
2. The Legislature should consider generating revenue from at least three specific revenue sources
 - a. Reversing previous tax cuts.

- b. Increasing the state school mill levy back to it former level
 - c. Increasing the state sales tax
3. The Commission recommends that the previously listed 8 points for educational success be continued which they cannot be under the 2009-2010 funding for Kansas schools.
 4. The Legislature should retain the three year funding cycle which helps school districts do advance planning and save money.
 5. The Legislature should shift the administration of the tiny-K and Early Head Start programs to the Department of Education.
 6. The Legislature should change the formula for determining special education catastrophic aid to either the Commission's or the Special Education director's recommendation. The two are very similar and would allow retention of basic funding for all special education.

The final recommendation has not been previously recommended by the Commission and would require introduction of a bill.

In closing, the Commission expires in December of 2010 and the legislature should consider whether they want to renew or change the Commission.