Attendees

Meeting Summary
Education topics were the focus of an April 3 legislative forum, sponsored by the Lee's Summit R-7 School District Citizens' Advisory Committee and Business Roundtable. The event was attended by approximately 60 members of the community teams who met in small groups with individual members of the Missouri General Assembly.

Missouri legislators attending included Sen. Will Kraus, Rep. Mike Cierpiot, Rep. Gary Cross, Rep. Jeff Grisamore and Rep. Noel Torpey. Topics discussed among the Citizens' Advisory Committee and Business Roundtable members and the legislators included the student-transfer state statute, tax reform, the Missouri education budget as well as additional education topics such as Common Core.

Kent Kirby, chairperson of the Citizens' Advisory Committee, kicked off the meeting with Bill Brown of the Business Roundtable Steering Committee wrapping up the small-group discussion topics. Small-group facilitators were Kent Kirby, Lynn Hinkle and Chip Moxley. Notetakers for the groups were Jacques Gragg, Elaine Bluml and Greg Arens and Rob Lund sharing a group. Dr. David McGehee, R-7 superintendent, shared the school district's legislative platform, emphasizing several key elements. These included:

- Support providing appropriations for fully funding the Foundation Formula.
- Support legislation that annually reviews the effectiveness of tax credits and appropriates the funding based on the review.
- Oppose any legislation that would reduce or divert revenue from the public schools, for example, scholarship or tuition tax credits, tuition tax deductions or vouchers.
- Oppose legislation that authorizes open enrollment.
- The consensus among Missouri education leaders is that transferring students out of unaccredited school districts is not in the best interest of all students and will not lead to improvement of unaccredited districts. We support a solution of support and early intervention.

Reports from each group
Please note that our reports from the small-group discussions are simply a capture of the discussion. Not all information has been verified for accuracy but is rather reported as presented by the officials.
The small group featuring Rep. Grisamore and Rep. Cross (who arrived after discussion started), facilitator Lynn Hinkle and notetaker Elaine Bluml submitted the following report:
Regarding private-school voucher, student transfers and Senate Bill 493, legislators shared that the bill was "loaded" before it arrived in the House, was too big, the Education Committee still needs to approve it, and that legislators tend to be pro-open enrollment now. The legislators need to begin again on this one with a single focus on improving the student transfer issue. Hands are currently tied by current statute and the courts. The state education commissioner predicts that Kansas City Public Schools may receive provisional accreditation next year, which would help ease the pressure locally in terms of transfers. The commission wants to see a solution that will help all children in the area. Transfers from private schools may be a problem. "Public schools should be publicly funded, private should be privately funded. However, using tax money to pay for charter schools is better than open enrollment. Legislators said they don't believe Senate Bill 493 will be approved this year because it is too loaded. The court will force transfers as provided by current law. The legislature is currently one-third urban/suburban and two-thirds rural, and rural areas are not concerned about the impact of Senate Bill 493. The representatives did not predict a large influx of students from the urban core to suburban schools and suggested contacting elected officials to "fix transfer law."

Regarding tax reform, legislators shared that pre-set triggers prevent tax cuts if revenue benchmarks are not met, and the house bill included 60 percent extra revenue earmarked for K-12. They also need to attach tax-credit reform to the bill, then tax cuts may be plausible – but we must meet revenue benchmarks before cuts will take place. Last year's bill included exceptions to the triggers, and these have been eliminated in the new bill. Regarding the question of the Hancock Amendment and tax cut bills, legislators said they can't predict how successful tax cuts will be for revenue development in this economy. Tax cuts could vary year to year by changing revenue/triggers annually. The representatives don't predict this bill will pass this year.

On the state budget, House Bill 2002, legislators shared that the bill was supported in the House but they can't predict what governor will do. They added that real-estate developers are major campaign contributors to elected officials and some representatives are protecting them when it comes to tax-credit reform.

On other topics, including Common Core, legislators shared that Common Core began at the national level but is being carried out state-by-state. The representatives oppose the legislature micromanaging the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and don't like DESE micromanaging teachers. They added that teachers shouldn't have their hands tied and should not scrap work already done on Missouri standards. Common Core has misinterpretations at the national level, and it has increased rigor and accountability. Global competition requires maintenance of the Common Core standards. Soft skills such as interviewing and personal finance management are also very important. Some Jefferson City legislators don't like Common Core because they oppose federal control.

The small group featuring Rep. Cierpiot, facilitator Chip Moxley and notetakers Greg Arens and Rob Lund submitted the following report:

Transfers: Rep. Cierpiot mentioned he is on the Committee for Elementary Education in the State House and makes any matters relating to schools a top priority. He is looking forward to the upcoming hearing on the transfer issue (this week). Rep. Cierpiot stated there are really two groups on the transfer issue – the Reform group and the Traditionalists. The Reform group can’t seem to get on the same page and therefore nothing really gets done. He recently led a group of senators and representatives on a trip to the St. Louis
area where they were able to visit and observe several schools that were in the eye of the issue. Some were still doing well and others not so well. He felt it was beneficial as he had hoped it opened up their eyes to what the kids in St. Louis were experiencing. All in all, he feels like Senate Bill 493 has a chance to pass this time through. He really wanted to make sure there were safeguards from over-crowding and still wants to make sure there is due diligence happening to make sure they know not only what schools can accept realistically, but also what potential damage transfers will do to the remaining schools. The overall goal is to get kids in good buildings (academically).

A question was asked if there is a common denominator among those schools that are failing? Rep Cierpiot – Feels there is something, but it hasn’t really been identified yet. He knows there are issues among some where the family life at home is not good and knows that has an effect. However, they can’t legislate around family issues and the goal is to set up an environment for kids to go to good schools.

Question on whether he receives any feedback from the rural school districts? Rep Cierpiot – Hears from them often. Knows they are working on a bill that will have more inclusions with rural districts and hopes he hears more feedback as it progresses. He noted that in general, when it comes to anything school related, if a bill is made big, it really struggles.

Question on whether the bill would cover the proposed budget and underfundment? Rep Cierpiot – Still need to examine the total impact if it passes, but would presume it would cover all needs.

Question on if there has been a study to truly find out how many kids would transfer? Rep Cierpiot – Various statistics thrown around, however, as the law states it doesn’t have to be only kids from struggling districts.

Tax Credits: Senate wants to reduce credits, but it didn’t get anything done. He emphasized that nobody builds without the help of public money. It has a larger affect when building slows in an area. He felt as though the Senate has a new mindset and that with compromise, they will get something passed next year.

Question was asked about the economic “border wars” between the states of Kansas and Missouri? He was unsure what the actual impact the issue was having between how much is lost/gained by each state as multiple statistics have been used. There is a bill out this year that would call a truce to it. In general, he would like to see the issue go away.

Open discussion regarding foundation reform from 2005. He felt the matter is tricky because it was hard to project the economic collapse in 2008/2009. Even so, it’s hard to project in 2005, what the economy will look like in 2014. There isn’t a projected “spending” 5-10 years out. Obviously the revenues aren’t what they projected in 2005. Reluctant to project up to the governor’s budget due to some rules the governor has with veto power.

Question: Will House pick up Sen. Kraus’ bill? Probably so and they will just let the governor veto it. Open discussion regarding the Governor’s office and team members. Rep. Cierpiot mentioned that the governor never comes to them for help and he rarely hears from his staffers. His office is close by but he has no idea what they are thinking on issues until the last minute before a vote. They don’t work with Rep. Cierpiot’s office.
Question regarding whether there will be any enhancements like the internet sales tax bill?
He mentioned there were two sets of numbers regarding the internet sales tax item specifically and that
the governor’s numbers were much lower. Unsure what other enhancements might be on the horizon.
Said he hears more from people worried about selling motorcycles on Sundays than any other issue in
Jefferson City.

Question whether the parties get along in Jefferson City?
He felt there weren’t any huge problems between them and that for the most part they work well. The real
problems tend to be in Washington D.C., not Jefferson City.

State Education Budget
Question on whether he feels there will be more work to do if the current form is fully funded at $122
million?
He feels if revenues are up, they will fund more. Mentioned that public education was never cut, just not
fully funded and that most things took a “haircut” after 2008/2009.

Question: Is there any chance to redo the current funding policy?
He is uncertain as to how it passed before and isn’t convinced people actually knew what they were voting
on at the time. He mentioned that rural communities delay reassessments and therefore cities end up
paying more because of it.

Regarding the current funding policy: “It’s like Nuclear Fusion – only about two people understand the
whole thing."

Comment and question regarding how most in Lee’s Summit feel regarding funding and that there is a
general feeling that Lee’s Summit has a good thing going. Common Core assessments are what got us there
and that moving things around would really hurt a district like Lee’s Summit. Are there concerns about
what immediate impact it would have on schools that are doing well?
Rep Cierpiot said there is a bill on the way in which kids would not count in test scores towards Common
Core for 1-2 years. He knows his districts want to be left alone. They have studied Kansas City Public
Schools to death. The KCPS situation has had issues with their Board of Education and superintendent
turnover and nothing ever seems to get done within the district. Two-thirds of the kids in KCPS are showing
test scores that indicate they aren’t proficient at anything. Likes the work Dr. Green is doing in KCPS but
that he is a victim of his predecessors.

Question on whether state commissioner has shirked responsibilities surrounding the new DESE rules or
does something need to be passed by Congress?
Rep. Cierpiot was unsure but he also doesn’t think a situation like the Normandy districts will happen again.
Dr. McGehee then commented that he thinks everyone will be taking a dip on percentage for future
funding.

Common Core vs. Senate Bills
In general, Rep. Cierpiot likes what he sees with Common Core. Likes the standards in place and doesn’t
want to see much done to it if any. Said his constituents are not happy with Common Core and he doesn’t
share in their dislike. He is bothered that there are a lot of constituents who are still bothered by Common
Core. Unsure what that might lead to in the future regarding Common Core.
Dr. John Faulkenberry, principal at Lee's Summit High School, then spoke about using ACT scores at the junior level as a benchmark to understand whether those kids are ready for college or not. Encouraged more cooperation in Jefferson City and also said we all need to speak up about Common Core to make sure our neighbors understand it.

The small group featuring Sen. Kraus, Rep. Torpey (and Rep. Cross for the first few minutes), facilitator Kent Kirby and notetaker Jacque Gragg submitted the following:
Regarding private-school vouchers and student transfers (Senate Bill 493), the legislators shared the following. Sen. Kraus: Directors move it through the process, and they "pile on" other issues to see what works. There are also trying to get others involved in the bill. Legislators said that to get a bill passed, it must include some type of "reform." Rep. Torpey: Also shared was fact that Senate and House want different things such as transfers, public choice and private-school choice (if students are in a failed school). Another option is to do nothing, offer open enrollment and then there's no say in the individual districts. In terms of getting a "clean" bill through the General Assembly, Sen. Kraus felt they must exhaust all other options, have a good balance with House and Senate, provide more accountability for charter schools and hold private schools accepting public money to the same standard as public schools. Rep. Torpey believes the bill will pass.

During the discussion about legislation cutting income taxes, Sen. Kraus shared that Missouri is falling behind in terms of job growth, 18 states cut taxes this year with Kansas cutting $1 billion in taxes, the governor's recommendation for a two-year delay, the possibility of a governor's veto, a five-year phase-in, business pass-through trigger as well as work to include safeguards to protect the state budget and public schools. Rep. Torpey thought this would not be a problem passing in the House.

During the discussion about tax-credit reform, Sen. Kraus shared that incentives for jobs "don't pick winners and losers," that the tax credit was originally developed to benefit housing for the poor and historical structures, it matches state and federal credit and costs $90 million per year and heavily impacts the state. Rep. Torpey said that the legislation is easier to kill than to pass.

Regarding the state budget, legislators shared that increases for public schools (including fully funding the formula) Sen. Kraus said there is a two-year delay in growth patterns in government, that we must prioritize and pay our debt first (bonds) and that the House and Senate are using different budgeting figures than the governor. Sen. Kraus added that probably won't happen this spring since it is an election year. Rep. Torpey also suggested a "lock box" was needed.

During discussion about Common Core, Sen. Kraus shared that there's been no debate on the Senate (as of the date of the forum. Rep. Torpey shared that legislators have heard that this is a result of anti-government sentiment, the feeling that there's too much data collection and that this is a political "hot potato." ACT tests are also shifting to Common Core standards. Sen. Kraus added that legislators are involved due to the need to watch the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Rep. Torpey said that Common Core communication and implementation was mishandled by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and what is happening with special-needs students related to Common Core needs to be watched closely.

Thank you for being a part of the Citizens' Advisory Committee!!
Please visit the CAC website at: http://www.lsr7.org/district/community/citizens-advisory-committee/