

Week Ending March 1st

It was a short week for the legislature, after each Chamber completed their sessions on Wednesday they decided it was time for break before starting turnaround next week.

A version of Gov. Laura Kelly's school finance proposal was defeated Tuesday along partisan lines but Senate Majority Leader Jim Denning, R-Overland Park, promised a \$90 million increase for public schools next year that he said the Legislature would approve in plenty of time to meet the Kansas Supreme Court's deadline.

On Wednesday the House and Senate debated and passed out a couple of bills affecting school boards.

SB 7 was introduced by Sen. Tom Hawk, D-Manhattan, to rectify an unintended consequence of a 2015 law that changed the date for school board and city commission elections from April of odd-numbered years to November of even-numbered years. That law did not, however, amend the existing statute requiring school boards to elect board officers in July of each year. The resulting gap between board elections in November, new boards taking office in January and the required July leadership election was problematic for some boards but not all. Hawk's bill says boards may elect their leaders in January or later to be determined by the board.

HB 2346 makes changes to standards for school-administered vision screening plans. Proponents of the bill say the state needs to update its vision screening process. The bill would require screening for every student in pre-school and kindergarten and grades 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 10 and new students in grades not requiring screening. The bill would

also establish a commission to oversee vision screening requirements, collect data and help identify resources to offer free or low-cost eye exams to children who fail vision screenings.

The drama on school finance Tuesday unfolded when the Senate considered SB 16, which would authorize school districts to expend at-risk funds on evidence-based learning programs. The bill was sought by Jobs for America's Graduates-Kansas. USA-Kansas was neutral on the legislation, saying that school districts can already use at-risk funds for these programs.

Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, used the opportunity to offer an amendment to **SB 16** that would implement the governor's K-12 funding plan for the next school year and then increase that by another \$90 million in second year. He described the amendment as a down payment showing a good faith effort to the state Supreme Court, which has told the Legislature to add an inflation adjustment to its multi-year funding plan approved last year.

But Republicans who dominate the chamber were having none of it. They said the funding proposal needed to be vetted through the committee process. Denning offered that the final school finance plan will include a \$90 million inflation increase "on the penny."

Hensley's amendment failed 12-28. All 11 Democrats and independent John Doll of Garden City voted for it while all 28 Republicans voted against it.

SB 16 was then advanced by the full Senate, as was **SB 128**, which would require nine school safety drills per year, to a final vote scheduled for Wednesday. In addition, **HB 2214**, which would amend

the definition of a school bus to remove a requirement the vehicle be designed for more than 10 passengers, was advanced to final action in the House.

Taxes

In tax news for the first part of the session **SB 22**, which would cut taxes by nearly \$190 million, has been approved by the Senate and continues to be considered despite Kelly's opposition. Nearly three-fourths of the cut would go toward corporations. A House committee amended the bill to also reduce the state sales tax on food from 6.5 cents per dollar to 5.5 cents per dollar and apply sales taxes to some internet purchases.

School Funding

SFFF has submitted amended and supplemented testimony to the **Senate Select Committee on Education Finance** that says **SB 44** has a drafting error that shortchanges by \$270 million what SFFF says is necessary to provide the inflation adjustment for school funding called for by the Kansas Supreme Court in the Gannon VI decision.

“Upon further analysis we find that, in its current form, SB 44 would not satisfy the Gannon VI decision. Without correction we cannot support SB 44,” the amended testimony by SFFF lobbyist Bill Brady says. **Adding the \$270 million will fix the problem, Brady says.**

USA-Kansas has not changed its position, but we will follow-up and work closely with the 40 plus school districts who have been heavily invested in this lawsuit for many years.