

GOP members of Kansas task force want more struggling students to repeat a grade

By: Tim Carpenter
KANSASREFLECTOR.COM

TOPEKA — Rep. Kristey Williams and Sen. Beverly Gossage landed on the same page Wednesday in terms of altering the state’s public education system to encourage students to address academic deficiencies by retaking a grade.

“Are we doing these children a favor by just moving them through the grades?” said Gossage, a Eudora Republican serving on the Kansas Legislature’s school finance task force. “We need to take a look at that at each grade level.”

Williams, an Augusta Republican on the task force, said Kansas ought to direct third-graders to summer school programs if those children weren’t academically prepared to enter fourth grade.

In Kansas, however, students couldn’t be compelled to attend summer school. The state’s public schools could mandate a student repeat a grade, Williams said.

“We’re going to have

to be a little bit stronger and not just give in on the first whim, the first cry,” Williams said.

Task force member Jim Porter, who serves on the Kansas State Board of Education and couldn’t read when he left third-grade, urged the task force to be wary of unintended consequences tied to holding students back.

“I think the research indicates . . . that holding kids back one year increases the probability of dropping out. Holding a kid back two years almost guarantees that they will be a dropout,” Porter said.

Task force chairwoman Renee Erickson, a Wichita Republican in the Kansas Senate, said students who couldn’t read by third grade were likely to face significant scholarly and behavioral challenges during the remainder of their school years.

“Those are students, in my experience, that become behavior problems in the classroom,” Erickson said. “They’d rather be a



Sen. Beverly Gossage of Eudora, center, and Rep. Kristey Williams of Augusta, right, agreed Kansas ought to increase pressure on parents to encourage their children to repeat a grade level if confronted with fundamental academic deficiencies. Other members of the Kansas Legislature’s school finance task force pushed back, saying repeating a grade carried unintended consequences for students. (Kansas Reflector screen capture of Kansas Legislature’s YouTube channel)

behavior problem than look stupid in front of their peers.”

The task force scheduled a series of meetings this summer and fall with the goal of developing by January a blueprint for reforming how the Legislature allocated state tax dollars to K-12 public school districts.

The current education finance system has been found by the Kansas Supreme Court to comply with the state Constitution, but many lawmakers bristle at the cost of public schools and the ability of

the state to suitably educate students.

Rep. Susan Estes, a Wichita Republican whose spouse is U.S. Rep. Ron Estes, said the objective should be a formula that guaranteed accountability for spending and improved educational opportunities for students. She said her key priorities were to enhance teacher salaries and concentrate on K-3 student learning.

“It really does come down to being able to redirect money,” she said. “We are trying to put together a 1,000-piece puzzle.”

Democrat Sen. Pat Pettey, a Kansas City, Kansas, member of the task force, said Kansas ought to expand its commitment to preparing 3- and 4-year-old children for public school. She said 90% of brain development occurred before age 5, but Kansas assisted only 47% of families with pre-K programs.

Kansas provided support to at-risk preschoolers for a half-day program despite working parents’ need for a full day of care, said task force member Melissa Rooker, executive director of the Kansas Children’s

Cabinet and Trust Fund.

“I would love to see us move from basically grant funding preschool offerings in Kansas to something more stable,” she said.

Rep. Nikki McDonald, an Olathe Democrat on the task force, said lawmakers should resist the temptation to micromanage school districts under the oversight of locally elected school boards and the elected state Board of Education.

The key measure of the state’s finance formula should be whether students sufficiently broadened their ability to process information, said Rep. Scott Hill, a task force member and Abilene Republican.

He said reading ability was a leading determinant of whether people were successful people were in life.

“Change for the sake of change is worse than no change,” he said. “Sometimes I think we want to not provide for the garden, but mow the weeds.”

PETE’S PUDDLE

From A1

rules and supplied an inventory of permanent living structures.

He also has supplied an alternate water use plan, as state engineers review the water source on the property.

The Kansan reported months ago that meetings with state water officials had met with Pete’s Puddle, confirmed by reports from county planning and zoning director Karen Rothe.

But the state has not permitted the water supply, which has led owners to provide pallets of bottled water as they await the final blessing.

“There is nothing we can do with the state,” Schroeder said. “... Often times it is [a process] with the state.”

In October the Planning and Zoning commission created an 11 item list of work needed done. Not everything has been done,

despite two extensions of the vote.

In October of 2024 the county commission pushed a vote on the special use permit to March 25. That vote was pursued back again, to May 1.

The problems for Pete’s Puddle, a camping/RV resort near Burrton, seemed to start after an all-day music festival last summer – an event that they unknowingly needed to apply for a conditional use permit to host.

Currently this property is zoned for use as a residential resort for camping, fishing and swimming activities. According to Rothe, small entertainment for members and guests is allowed, however larger events for the general public would require a conditional use permit.

That limit is 250 people, including campers and residents at the facility.

The owners of the resort applied for that permit, wanting to use a new open-air hoop house style building to host concerts and events at the more than 50-year-old resort.

It was during that

process that several other issues were found, including possible problems with the water/sewer system, building construction in flood plains and possibly buildings bleeding onto neighboring properties.

In all the planning and zoning commission created an 11-point bullet list of issues that the board believes needs to be dealt with in order for a permit to be issued.

Some of those issues found, most keeping the property in compliance with all Harvey County regulations as well as state and federal requirements; compliance with KDHE for potable water and sewer; and compliance with FEMA special flood hazard areas could affect whether or not the resort can remain open at all.

Rothe said June 3 she believed that some of the flood plan properties can be receive a Letter of Map Amendment from FEMA, effectively removing it from the flood plain.

The 11 conditions of the planning and zoning board created last year

included:

1. No Parking in right-of-way or on roads or shared easements. No parking will be allowed on neighboring property without an agreement from the property owner. We must provide Planning and Zoning staff with a copy of the agreement.
2. Property driveways/easements/roads will be kept passable for neighboring properties and for emergency vehicles to access all of the public areas of Pete’s Puddle.
3. Portable restrooms and handwashing stations should be provided for the public at each event.
4. Emergency responders and Sheriff will be contacted prior to large public events so they are aware of the event. All adjoining neighbors shall be notified of events. Proof of notification must be provided to the Planning and Zoning Office if requested.
5. Noise levels and time of events shall not be a nuisance to neighboring properties. Applicants will adjust sound levels and times of events as needed for neighboring residential

properties.

6. No alcohol sales without proper licensing and approval.
7. Trash and debris from events will be cleaned up within 24 hours after the event from ditches, roadways and property and put into dumpsters. Debris and trash must be kept off neighboring properties.
8. If needed, the applicant will provide traffic control for events. If an event causes damage to roadways or shared easements, applicant will assist township in cost of repairs to township roads and will repair shared easements back to their prior condition or better.
9. Applicant will keep property in compliance with all Harvey County regulations as well as State and Federal requirements. This includes obtaining building permits and meeting all sanitary codes.
10. Conditional Use Permit will not be finalized until all building permits and documents currently requested by staff and all requirements of KDHE have been met including Harvey County

Unified Development Code Section 16.05

3. Campgrounds/RV Parks shall have an approved potable water supply and wastewater treatment and disposal system. Proof from KDHE of compliance is required. Inventory of current structures is also required along with requested permits.
11. As long as property remains in the FEMA Special Flood Hazard area, all RV’s, Campers and Vehicles (Harvey County UDC 15.25), all recreational vehicles placed on sites in A zone shall either A) Be on site for fewer than 180 consecutive days and be fully licensed and ready for highway use. (A recreational vehicle is ready for highway use if it is on its wheels (tires must have air) or jacking system, is attached to the site only by quick disconnect type utilities and security devices and has no permanently attached additions. Must all have current tags and registration.) orB) Meet the permitting, elevating, and anchoring requirements for manufactured homes.

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