

**MINUTES OF THE
EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, May 19, 1999 - 9:00 a.m. - Room 303 State Capitol

Members Present:

Sen. David H. Steele, Chair
Rep. Lloyd Frandsen, Chair
Sen. Ron Allen
Sen. Karen Hale
Sen. Lyle W. Hillyard
Sen. Howard A. Stephenson
Rep. Jeff Alexander
Rep. Ron Bigelow
Rep. Duane Bourdeaux
Rep. Judy Ann Buffmire
Rep. Fred J. Fife III
Rep. James R. Gowans
Rep. David L. Hogue
Rep. Bradley T. Johnson
Rep. Keele Johnson
Rep. Evan L. Olsen
Rep. Tammy J. Rowan
Rep. LaWanna "Lou" Shurtliff
Rep. Nora B. Stephens
Rep. Matt Throckmorton
Rep. Bill Wright

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Mr. J. Wayne Lewis,
Research Analyst
Mr. James L. Wilson,
Associate General Counsel
Ms. Wendy L. Bangerter,
Secretary

Note: A list of others present and a copy of materials distributed in the meeting are on file in the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel.

1. **Call to Order** - Rep. Frandsen called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.
2. **Committee Business**
 - a. Mr. Jim Wilson, Associate Legislative Legal Counsel, reported that the Legislative Management Committee approved the committee's request for joint meetings with the State Board of Education and the State Board of Regents during the summer. The meetings will be held August 20, 1999, in Salt Lake City.
 - b. MOTION: Rep. Bigelow moved to approve the minutes of the Education Interim Committee meetings held September 23, 1998 and April 21, 1999. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Review of School Safety Laws - Legislative Leadership Request** – Mr. Wilson

reviewed current Utah school safety laws. He pointed out that each school is required to develop its own student conduct policies to ensure a safe school environment, and each district is mandated to develop policies which respond to and even prevent gang-related activities. The law strictly prohibits weapons, with certain exceptions. Students possessing firearms at school would be in violation of several state laws.

School Safety Review Participants

Mr. Steve Laing, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, told the committee that schools should be a safe place for students and teachers. Mr. Laing prefers a strong state-wide program to prevent school violence. He introduced Mr. Vern Larsen, State Specialist for Safe and Drug-free Schools. Mr. Larsen trains teachers and administrators in strategies to help students feel meaningfully connected to society. Mr. Larsen emphasized the importance of students having access to an adult they know and trust, but explained that schools are not currently adequately staffed for that purpose. He expressed concern over with the impropriety of any guns in schools.

Mr. Laing reviewed the following four critical components to intervention in and prevention of potentially violent situations: 1) strong school district safety policies; 2) a strong prevention foundation; 3) an intervention effort; and 4) strong networking relationships with mental health and substance abuse agencies and social providers.

Mr. Barry Newbold, President of the Utah School Superintendents Association and Superintendent of Jordan School District, reviewed responses to the following four questions included on a survey sent to many of his colleagues: 1) What might be some of the underlying causes contributing to unsafe conditions in schools? 2) What are districts doing to create a safe school environment? 3) What more could districts do? 4) What suggestions would you provide to the Legislature that would enable it to contribute to creating a more safe school environment? He distributed a list of the superintendent's responses and highlighted the following common themes:

- C Schools are, by-in-large, safe places and current laws have been helpful as districts work to enforce those laws. Laws help make schools safe.
- C Schools are a reflection of society. Student behavior has its roots in the home, neighborhood, community, and through the media.
- C If schools are expected to intervene with at-risk behaviors in the school setting, then they need more counselors, teachers, and support staff to provide personalized help.
- C Young people need to have a good relationship with a trusted adult.
- C Better communication is needed between schools, courts, and health and human service providers.
- C Schools have and need to have strict policies on dangerous weapons, drugs and

school violence.

- C An on-going partnership with law-enforcement officers is needed. Guns have no place in schools.
- C There is a need to foster better understanding between schools and the media.

Mr. Darrell White, Superintendent of the Davis School District, agreed that school violence is a societal problem and needs to be addressed from a broad perspective. The Davis School District addresses school safety and security responsibilities in the following areas:

- C Security - Law enforcement officers are present in both the Jr. High and high schools. Their activities are coordinated by a district coordinating officer. An electronic key system has been installed to eliminate duplication of keys.
- C Preparation - Preparation of a safety plan in each school to manage all school safety incidents and to provide training to faculty, staff, and students.
- C Prevention - Violence begins with an attitude of forcing others to accept one's own perspective. The prevention portion of a school safety plan should receive the most attention. It is a long-range effort to ensure every student has a good relationship with a trusting adult in the school community.

Mr. White distributed a graph showing each component of the Davis County School Safety Program. He said Davis School District has created a School Safety Task Force and established a coordinating council that meets regularly to address safety of children in the district. This has been a significant achievement. He reviewed an alternative education program for student discipline problems that implements the use of the most restrictive school environment to the least restrictive. The program has five levels that require continual education and maximize the prevention of violence.

Rep. Patrice Arent introduced draft legislation entitled "Schools Safety Plans." She indicated that some schools currently have safety plans but often those plans are not known by the school community. She emphasized the need to coordinate school safety plans with law enforcement and to educate the public about emergency response plans. She felt the Legislature should not dictate the contents of specific safety plans but each district should develop its own plan and then be certain it is consistent throughout each school within the district. She requested input from the committee regarding the draft legislation.

Ms. Paula Plant, PTA Legislative Liaison, referred to a school safety questionnaire distributed during a recent PTA convention. She said 72 percent of respondents felt their children were safe in public schools, but their main concerns are for a continued safe school environment and substance abuse. She found safe-school policies were not consistent throughout districts and sometimes parents are uninformed about their content. Many parents would support funding for additional prevention programs. The survey indicated that parents were also supportive of

employing additional elementary school counselors as a significant prevention and intervention resource for assuring school safety.

Ms. Phyllis Sorensen, UEA President, emphasized the need for each parent to be part of a movement to ensure the safety of every child. UEA feels a comprehensive statewide plan could ensure the safety of all public education students. She feels that prevention policies are key to any successful plan and proposed the following components as part of a comprehensive safety plan.

- C Reading and remediation programs;
- C Conflict-resolution instruction for settling differences between students, without violence;
- C Training school employees to identify possible problems or at-risk students;
- C More guidance counselors in schools at a ratio that will help the students; and
- C Middle school class-size reduction to improve the learning environment.

Ms. Sorensen felt the Legislature should enact legislation that will limit access to firearms and require responsible storage and handling of guns.

MOTION: Sen. Stephenson moved to amend the agenda to allow for further discussion of the previously addressed issues until 11:30 a.m.

SUBSTITUTE MOTION: Rep. Buffmire made a substitute motion to allow for discussion of these issues until 11:00 a.m. The motion passed with Sen. Hillyard and Rep. Rowan and Stephens voting in opposition.

Points addressed during the additional discussion time included:

- C Teachers' lack of authority to maintain discipline in the classroom;
- C Some feel the threshold required to adopt school uniforms in a specific school is too high;
- C The responsibility of society to reject violence;
- C Limiting youth access to videos. Videos have become moral instructors;
- C Class size reduction for more teacher involvement with the students;
- C Strictly enforced smoking laws;
- C The benefit of teachers spending more time with students outside of class time in other school settings, such as the lunch room;
- C Encouraging professional dress standards among teachers;
- C Tracking student-disciplinary measures;
- C No school in Utah has ever had a problem with a person licensed to carry a concealed weapon brandishing or discharging the weapon at school;
- C The differences between public and private schools as relating to school safety;

- C The ill effects upon education when the subject of God is removed from class room discussion;
- C Early intervention with at-risk students;
- C Mandatory attendance factor;
- C Zero tolerance policy for firearms in school zones;
- C Better enforcement of existing laws; and
- C Allowing teachers to carry concealed weapons.

Rep. Frandsen asked that further responses be submitted to the chairs in writing.

Rep. Throckmorton requested staff review the Miller case regarding pornography as a public nuisance.

4. Review 1999 Interim Assignments and Discussion Format - Specific members of the Utah education community, including PTA, State Office of Education, and UEA were requested to review the seven interim study topics for 1999 and prepare proposed solutions to each issue. Rep. Frandsen reviewed the list of interim assignments and read a number of proposed solutions. He suggested that Ad Hoc committees could be formed to address some of the larger issues, but all items listed in the "Compilation of Results" paper found in the agenda packet will be heard prior to the conclusion of the interim. Each topic will become the central focus of a future meeting. The issues he reviewed included; public education capitol outlay, school counselors, school environments, school innovations, educational adequacy, professional development, and state and local board responsibilities.

Rep. Alexander recommended study of state and local school board responsibilities before considering other topics. Rep. Stephens felt accountability for student results and outcomes in school programs should be addressed by the committee. She said it is important to go beyond testing and scores in measuring outcomes. Rep. Olsen suggested that the committee review the use of federal programs that often result in the state relinquishing its local control.

Rep. Frandsen requested the Legislative Fiscal Analyst's Office assist in gathering information for the committee to review the acceptance of federal education monies and understand what trade-offs may exist. It was suggested that elected officials review all contracts for money coming into the state since the Legislature is responsible for appropriating money to fund those programs.

5. Adjournment

MOTION: Rep. Alexander moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:00 noon. The motion passed unanimously.

