



## Observer Corps Report

**Observer:** Jane Skinner

**Meeting Observed:** Special Meeting: Legislative Breakfast with Board of Education and Knox Co. State Legislators to discuss KCS Legislative Priorities

**Meeting Date:** 1-9-26

**No recording of the meeting.**

**Attendees:** Knox County Board of Education - Kristi Kristy, Kat Bike, Rev. John Butler, Steve Triplett, Patricia Fontenot-Ridley, Anne Templeton, Travis Wright, and Lauren Morgan. Student Representative Albert Liu. Betsy Henderson was not present.

State Representatives: Elaine Davis, Gloria Johnson, Sam McKenzie, Michelle Carringer, Dave Wright. Justin Lafferty did not attend. Jason Zachary attended the breakfast, and left before the discussion began.

State Senators: Becky Duncan Massey, Richard Briggs

KCS Staff: Superintendent John Rysewyk, Kory Lautner, Garfield Adams, Andrew Brown, Daria Turner, Keith Wilson

### **Notes:**

Meeting was led by Travis Wright

Introduction of KCS Staff

Kory Lautner explained the KCS Action Plan

Change in ELA approach curriculum

Region 5

- Lonsdale moving off Federal List

865 Academies - every KCS high school is now an 865 Academy

Teacher Shortages

- Recruitment and retention
- 10 available teacher openings

- Strategy not really covered

School Safety - one of the largest enforcement agencies in the state  
Dr. Brown - improvements made across the district

Project Search - SPED work internship/job placement program

ELL - double students who leave for services

SPED - 5 year strategic plan published this year

Budget

### **Questions**

Q: Rep McKenzie: Is data available by region? Would like to see the breakdown of data.

A: Rysewyk assured him that Region 5 specifically has improved

R: Rep. McKenzie requested a full breakdown.

Rep. G. Johnson: Congratulated KCS for being able to stretch the \$5,300 allocated for KCS students vs. the \$7800 voucher students receive. Need voucher accountability and responsibility of tax dollars.

Q: Rep. Carringer: What is the comparison of now versus Covid? Public schools know what they're getting from the state. School choice: Knox County has high demand for vouchers. We don't know what is being taught comparison to Chattanooga Nashville and Memphis pontificating on vouchers better for everyone

R: Rysewyk: Gradual reduction in enrollment is attributed to family sizes

R: Lautner: 5.95 to 5.7 enrollment projection but doesn't attribute it to anything.

Carringer: More students cost more money. Educating illegal students costs money, mentioned house bill 793 not specifically but backtracked.

Rev. Butler mentioned education for all priorities. Anything that doesn't help students hurts them. Mentioned Lonsdale reminder that their business is school. Vouchers can be an argument but HB793 is not.

Kat Bike: public schools equal service. Private schools not providing the same services.

Rep. Gloria Johnson: Immigration not in the school board's purview; really the state's.

Senator Briggs: Cost of bill enforcement would be expensive - est. \$1 billion, and time consuming

Triplett: doubling down - the bill is currently optional

Q: Fontenot Ridley: Who pays for immigration enforcement?

A: McKenzie: Discussed the difficulty of actually enforcing HB 793. Said KCS will have to pay for it.

Q: Templeton: If given a choice on HB793, will state take money?

Triplett mentioned importance of local control and avoiding an unfunded mandate

Kristy: Respectful way bills are written - appreciated the "optional" language

Rep. Carringer: Rural areas run the state. Local control is important. Local people need to make decisions. Supporter of the 865 Academies. Choose battles and not getting everything you want.

Triplett: TISA funding for preschools “cakewalk bill”

Sen. Massey: Explaining process of cakewalk bill. State has to vote during gubernatorial vote.

Bike any initiative

Rep. McKenzie: Is cakewalk bill worth it?

Triplett: Retention is a priority

Bike: Discussed issue with retention law - three versus one tutoring Summer camps with tutoring K through two support

Rysewyk: Used Covid money to cover tutoring and unable to do early intervention.

Rep. McKenzie - Anything you want, the community needs to ask for it.

Triplett: Already doing things about early intervention

Dr. Brown education on early intervention - alignment of interventions

Lautner: Explained the difference between what was being done with us and partners.

Q: Rep. Carringer: Money to Boys and Girls Club, can it be met outside of the school?

A: Rysewyk: Yes and no. Schools are better because teachers are better. Using partnerships to meet student needs teachers.

C: Sen. Massey: Continuing education outside of the class, we are lucky to be able to farm out jobs.

R: Rysewyk: Using second shift teachers for after school. Using AI to help create curriculum and sharing with Emerald Youth and Boys and Girls

C: Bike: At Sequoia Elementary, relationships strengthened with teachers in school because of continuing tutoring. Teachers write teacher evaluations

Q: Triplett: Is it possible to stabilize federal funding?

A: Sen. Massey: A case needs to be made, but basically no.

C: Bike: Advocate for public schools 3.4 million hard to get every legislation

Q: Fontenot-Ridley: Can rainy day fund money be used?

A: Sen. Massey: Money can't be accessed without government approval.

C: Rep. McKenzie: Money hasn't been touched even during hurricane relief.

C: Sen. Massey: Resolutions don't matter as much as direct contact. Reach out and call the right people.

C: Rep. Wright: Military focus (ROTC) in schools is good. Encouraged board members to take part in statewide advocacy.

C: Rep. G. Johnson: Importance of resolutions they let the public know what the needs are. It's community education.

C. T. Wright: Mentioned community schools in passing.