Monday, June 17th—Joint work session with the Coordinating Board of Higher Education to hear reports and discuss College and Career Readiness in Missouri.

After a short introduction and welcome, the joint chairs (Herschend and Wright) call the meeting to order.

Sharon Helwig and Rusty Mahone (sp?) are the first presenters and they speak about Common Core. Helwig notes the research represented in the graph in the presentation that demonstrates routine manual and routine cognitive skill jobs are declining. The jobs that are increasing call for 21st Century skills of innovation, critical thinking and creativity. Common Core would address these needs, according to Helwig. In addition Common Core saves money because it should help reduce remediation in colleges once everyone is invested in the system. She notes that Common Core adoption is moving forward. DESE has produced a crosswalk document, statewide public sessions are underway, training teams are being formed and lots of webinars are now available.

Rusty Mahone speaks about Missouri being stuck in the middle when it comes to education stats. Describes the two goals of Top 10 By 20 and 60% of Missourians with meaningful post secondary education by 2025. He says the best way to achieve these is to—

- Assure academic preparation
- Reduce time of completion of post secondary education
- Assure academic rigor

He describes HB 1082 and the impact on the way the collegiate level thinks about best practices. National figures note that 41% of college freshman need remediation. Missouri data is unclear due to inconsistent reporting from institutions. Remediation, of course, means it takes longer to complete a degree program and also drains resources that might be used in other ways. In the final analysis, remediation programs tend not to be very successful anyway. In other words, (mine) we’re wasting a boatload of money right now on a system that works pretty poorly at remediating borderline students.

Now the boards start questioning the presenters. Jones asks about the ability and mission of the community colleges to remediate. Mahone notes we are not very good about defining ‘college ready’ and so remediation is not very effective. In fact, the community college definition is sometimes more stringent than 4 year colleges. Herschend notes that we need to work on the consistency there. Higher ed. member Sims says one of the problems with being college ready is that the knowledge needed for different fields of study varies widely. She is a mathematician but readily admits many degree programs do not require lots of math. H’mmm, I wish my Algebra II teacher back in high school would have been so willing to admit that.

Helwig begins the discussion about smarter balanced assessment programs. Mahone notes that higher ed is generally supportive and thinks it will help create more consistency and alignment of all levels. Herschend asks how we can know that End of Course exams will lead to the correct amount of
knowledge and skill for success in college. Again alignment is an issue. There is significant discussion of the repercussions of a student’s failure on tests. Is that an overall failure or just for the one course?

Mahone talks about alignment programs that have already begun. Nicastro relates that to the cut levels on tests that are being devised. Jones uses a sports analogy to explore what is the proper level of ‘cut.’ He also notes that universities and colleges don’t have an incentive to cut students, they have dorms and classrooms to fill. An uneasy silence fills the room from the college board. Mahone brings the conversation back to determining cut levels and uses the analogy of a place kicker on a football team to note that a ‘one-size fits all’ policy will miss the point. How then to address the diversity of pathways with a single regime of testing or assessment? How indeed?

Mahone asks the question what does a high school diploma really mean and does it align with college and career readiness. An uneasy silence fills the room from the SBoE. But then there seems to be general agreement that the idea a diploma represents a measurable level of achievement is hard to support right now. Sims would like a study to see if the diploma does equate with success. Wright seems to like this idea. My comment—another study?

Helwig then expresses concern about high school students who just decide to go to college without a clear plan. She emphasizes that pathways programs in high schools are imperative. In fact when we get to early childhood programs, she seems to like the idea of pathways extending down to that level.

Still asks if all community colleges test for the need to remediate. The answer seems to be yes and the useful instruments are the ACT and COMPASS tests. He notes that many schools are open enrollment schools (ya’ll come, you hear?) and CBHE needs to define that better. Even open enrollment is a misnomer in that all applicants have to have a high school diploma or equivalent. Nicastro notes that SBoE also sets grad requirements.

Helwig reinforces that good cooperation is currently going on while devising Smarter Balanced assessments. Mahone wants to be sure the test doesn’t just identify those being left behind and then nothing is done. All need to be brought up, he says. Herschend notes there are always going to be students who are challenges and possibly unsuccessful. An uneasy silence fills the room from the teachers who have been drilled with “Every child can learn.” dogma. Wright brings up the idea of Performance Funding. He seems to be talking about university programs, but the possible application to elementary and secondary level creates another one of those uneasy silence moments. They seem to be coming very quickly now. Lots of controversy swirls around this idea to award funding based on student performance.

The discussion comes around to the possibility that too narrow a model of education is being used. There is worry that career training has taken over as the be-all, end-all of education and that the formation of good human beings has been lost. General consensus is expressed that liberal arts education is still a good thing and that critical and creative thinking skills tend to come from that kind of instruction. They worry about education having been hijacked into a training model.

Break

After the break the discussion focuses on educator preparation programs. If you would like to see the details of the new program, they are on the June agenda on the SBoE website. Basically there will be Gateway assessments for potential teachers that will attempt to identify
- the right people for the teaching field
- that those people have the right knowledge and skill set
- that those people are prepared to adequately communicate the knowledge and skills to students.

A heads up was given about the NCTQ report to be released on Tuesday. It will not look kindly on Missouri teacher training, but there are some political factors to be considered in the background of this organization. NCTQ rates teacher prep programs with the bias of their major donors, who favor statewide (even nationwide) coordination of programs and curriculums. They also seek to quantify readiness—so, for example, if a school accepts statistically borderline students into teacher training then they are penalized for that. However, even with that caveat, the report is not a good one for Missouri teacher training institutions.

Herschend worries about the implications of identifying the best and then, especially the worst. What happens to those bottom-feeder programs, who may only be down among the kelp plants due to statistical data, rather than actual practice. Vandeven notes that no one gets thrown under the bus right away and DESE/CBHE will work with programs. The question is asked about the number of teacher degrees we give out annually. Missouri grants about 4,000 a year of which 1/3 find teaching jobs. That causes a really uneasy silence in the room. The staff notes that many of the new aspects of the upcoming teacher evaluation and preparation programs address the failings that have been noted.

Sidebar—If you saw the National Council on Teacher Quality report in newspapers yesterday, you can see how poorly Missouri rated. A couple of caveats—most institutions submitted incomplete information and some refused to participate at all—my alma mater, Culver-Stockton, for one. Only Missouri State and M S & T in Rolla had high scores.

At this point, Wright invites open discussion on the issues raised so far. Threads of discussion involve the following—

- the role of online education, there are worries about its effectiveness and its impact on brick and mortar schools, especially at the university level. There are even teacher training programs out there that don’t get students into classrooms until very late in the process
- Sims wants to explore flexibility between 11th grade and college freshmen—are there other ways of structuring that time rather than in classrooms?
- Jones waxes philosophical about what constitutes a good education. Can we define it?
- Shields asks about pay for performance. Should teachers and schools be paid based on the performance of their students. There would have been an uneasy silence except that Nicastro quickly notes that we do accreditation not payment for meeting standards. Shields wonders if Financial incentivization might be useful. I wonder about how many syllables I can say in one breath. All joking aside, Shields does not necessarily support such a system but says he felt he had to raise the question.

In summary, the boards seem to agree that assessment of educational achievement is difficult and alignment at different levels is even more difficult. There is real concern over the validity of various assessment instruments and whether we are losing the real purpose of education with over-testing.

The meeting is adjourned for the day.
Tuesday’s meeting
Regular SBoE meeting

In attendance—Shields, Still, Jones, Herschend, Lenz and Demien

Victor Lenz is sworn in and welcomed as the new SBoE member.

The agenda and minutes were approved

As part of the President’s report it is noted that Lenz’s term runs through 2019. An explanation is given for why Michael Ponder continued to serve this spring. Although he was appointed by the Governor back in February he had to be confirmed in that appointment. He must now officially resign because he has been confirmed as a member of the Board of Regents.

Still notes that the NASBE conference is approaching and he will attend. Shields notes a meeting with a KC school board member which he hopes will begin a process of cooperation and collaboration. Still notes the completion of Battle HS in Columbia. Herschend notes the attendance of Rep Cookson, the chair of the House Education Comm.

Consent agenda is passed.

Major items for today’s agenda are the pieces about teacher training and early childhood education.

Gateway Assessments (MEGA) presented by Paul Katnik
NCTQ reveals lots of problems with the collection of data for teacher training. The new assessments on the horizon should address many of those concerns. He reminds us that the teacher training programs will work toward three goals—the right people, the right knowledge, the right skill set demonstrated through a clinical experience.

1. Right people—a new test will replace the College BASE. The new test begins implementation this fall. Known as the GEA, it is being reviewed for bias, content and the standards that are necessary. The purpose of this test and other early steps that institutions will take is to weed out people who will not be successful as teachers. At this point Shields asks how the cut score is arrived at and expresses shock that only 1/3 of teacher graduates are employed in Missouri. He notes this is a significant problem. Katnik hopes these tests and procedures may eliminate some students from training programs who should not be there. Herschend wants to know when the test is given. The answer is early in college before the student starts the teacher training process. Herschend emphasizes the need to actively recruit good teachers rather than sift through 4000 to find the right 1,300. He notes a huge supply and demand problem here. He worries that we have too many people in programs and not in the right areas.

2. Content assessment—There are 42 different areas of certification in Missouri. Shield wants to know that if we have a supply and demand problem can we control that by assigning each university a number of graduates for certain years? Nicastro is very hesitant about that. Katnik notes that DESE can exert some control already by controlling the number of teaching certificates it grants. Demien worries that we are exerting too much control and argues for freedom of choice. The Board then begins an extended conversation about student’s rights to choose their path. Lenz notes that at the very least the
assessments can be used to help a student decide on career paths. I note that Dr. Lenz is a perceptive person. It doesn’t have to be a “pass the test or you can’t teach” kind of ultimatum.

Jones notes that the 1/3 stat may not be as bad as we think. Many of those students who do not land teaching jobs, may get analogous occupations—corporate training, private schools, or simply choose out of state jobs. At any rate, any attempt to ration the number of teachers would raise serious concerns with the board.

3. The clinical experience—What a horrible term for teaching! New Performance assessments are being implemented this fall for teachers and they want the student teaching assessments to mirror those. That also applies to educational leaders. Demien asks for clarification as to whether a new teacher can opt to go straight into admin. No, there is a minimum teaching time required. Herschend uses the opportunity to emphasize the need to recruit good educational leaders from the ranks of teachers.

They move on to government affairs—Dr. Van Zandt

Van Sandt reports that overall this was a pretty good session. Harmful legislation did not pass and helpful legislation mostly did. The key bills--

SB 125 was all about employment provisions and most of it did not get passed. That which did seems to help the Board to move more quickly and with more flexibility on failing school districts.

HCS 17 includes the career and tech advisory committee and a Gifted ed advisory committee. I noted that the gifted position for DESE was never mentioned. Is it actually part of law? I would have thought that would be mentioned.

SB 17 is an omnibus bill with lots of provisions in it.

- describes the appointment process for career and tech advisory
- Bryce’s law changes to address how autism is treated
- an advisory council on gifted and talented
- guidelines for training staff on how to deal with students with diabetes
- A physical fitness standard challenge was addressed
- A provision to address sexual abuse of children and how to report

Jones asks what really changes for the board in these laws. Van Zandt answers that the most apparent immediate change will be the way the Board may now address failing districts.. Immediate and flexible action can occur. Nicastro notes plans already being discussed for ‘what if’ they must act. Shields exacts a promise that the board will not act hastily on the programs at borderline schools.

Early Childhood Education—purpose to adopt assessment and standards

Goal 2 of the SBoE overall goals—All children will enter kindergarten prepared to be successful in school

Kathy Thornburg reports on early childhood assessment. Why they chose to discuss assessment before adopting the actual standards, I don’t know. Essentially after a series of pilots and trial runs, DESE has decided to adopt the DRDP instrument as the ‘recommended’ assessment for early childhood. Districts can choose others, if they wish. This begins a huge discussion on the political backlash if citizens feel that the state is dictating too much about what little children must know and do. They worry about a
perception of overreach and state wrestling control away from the local community. There are even more concerns about the standards themselves. No one worries too much about the actual content of the standards or benchmarks. It is just this sense of government stepping in to what should normally be the work within a family. The enabling motion is delayed so that Van Zandt can change the language to avoid the misunderstanding among the very conservative. These will be guidelines that give parents, day care providers and preschools clear understanding of how each child should be progressing.

Lunch is called while Mr. Van Zandt works on wording.

We return from lunch, hear two motions to adopt the early childhood no-longer-called standards—which, by the way, do not reveal the new wording to those of us in the audience—and then the Board goes into closed session. That was anti-climactic.

If you have any questions about this report please feel free to send them to me at beninkc3@att.net

Respectfully submitted,

Ben Martin, Executive Director
Missouri Alliance for Arts Education