

Coalition of Innovative School Districts Annual Update

**House Education Committee**

by

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Chairperson of Coalition of Innovative School Districts**

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The Coalition of Innovative School Districts is the direct result of HB 2319 that was signed into law in April 2013. The bill authorized a process where a local board of education could apply for authority to operate as a “public innovative district”. The bill limited the number of public innovative districts to no more than 10% of the state’s school districts at any time with the option of adding additional districts that qualified as Title I Focus or Priority Districts. The law allows public innovative districts to be exempt from all laws, rules, and regulations that are applicable to school districts. Public innovative districts cannot charge tuition and must participate in all Kansas math and reading assessments as required by the Federal Government. Public innovative districts must also abide by all financial and auditing requirements and must comply with all applicable health, safety, and access laws. In addition to this, public innovative districts are also subject to all laws regarding Special Education, open meetings, and open records acts.

In February 2014, the first two districts were selected, McPherson and Concordia, and Randy Watson was named the Chair of the Coalition. In May 2014, two State Board of Education member were selected to meet with the Coalition. In June 2014, the State Board of Education officially approved McPherson and Concordia as the founding members of the Coalition of Innovative School Districts. One of the first acts of the Coalition was to develop by-laws and these were formally approved by the State Board of Education in August 2014. In October 2014, the State Board of Education approved the applications from Hugoton, Kansas City, and Blue Valley to join the Coalition. In February 2015, Marysville joined the Coalition and then Fredonia was added to the Coalition in August 2016.

During the 2014-15 school year, the Coalition focused primarily on writing the by-laws, establishing procedures, and laying the foundation for the future work of the Coalition. This involved building a strong partnership with the State Board of Education and with the Kansas Department of Education. I do not believe the goal of the Coalition was to operate independently of the State Board of Education or the Kansas Department of Education, but instead to collaborate with them to affect change that would benefit the students not only in our districts but also across the State of Kansas. During the 2015-16 school year, the Coalition spent a lot of time learning more about each of the districts in the Coalition and the programs within each district. During 2016-17, we have adjusted our focus to defining the work of the Coalition, communicating our message, and focusing on innovative approaches and programs aligned with the Kansans Can! Vision.

In the past, the Coalition seemed to focus on rules and regulations that were barriers for our districts. This year, we are changing how we work together and our focus. We are focused on being more innovative as we strive to show improvement around the State Board of Education outcomes 1) Kindergarten Readiness, 2) Social Emotional Learning, 3) Individual Plans of Study, 4) Graduation Rates and 5) Post-Secondary Attendance and Completion Rates. This year and in the future, we want to focus first on being innovative and second focus on what is hindering us from implementing the innovative strategies and programs. This year we are using ZOOM Videoconferencing to conduct many of our meetings and we have scheduled five full day work sessions throughout the year to facilitate our work.

We have defined three Sub-Committees this year around Assessment, Social Emotional Learning, and Graduation Requirements/Individual Plans of Study.

To date the Coalition and the State Board of Education has granted a waiver to Concordia allowing them to continue using AdvancEd for their accreditation process. We believe the conversation around this topic had an impact on the final design of the KESA Accreditation process that all Kansas schools will use beginning next year. Because of this, many districts including Fredonia will either continue using or begin using AdvancEd. The Coalition and the State Board of Education also granted a waiver to Marysville to use a different timeline for completing teacher evaluations than what is currently in statute. This waiver was sought because the model for teacher evaluations today is much different than it was when the original law was written.

In July 2015, the State Board of Education approved a procedure allowing the Coalition Districts to award Specialized Certificates to employ qualified professionals as classroom teachers. The procedure is very detailed and each applicant must be approved by the Local Board of Education, by the Coalition Board of Directors, and the State Board of Education. In June 2016, the State Board of Education gave final approval for the first 15 Specialized Certificates to individuals employed by the Kansas City Kansas School District. In December 2016, the Coalition approved another five Specialized Certificates for individuals employed by the Kansas City Kansas School District. The State Board of Education will formally approve these five individuals in February 2017.

It has been said many times at our meetings that there are many schools and districts across the State who are very innovative in what they do, even more innovative than some of us. As a Coalition, we strive to do a better job of serving our students and our communities in all that we do. Being a member of the Coalition helps each of us grow individually which helps us lead our districts more effectively. We believe that the conversations that we have had as a Coalition have influenced the discussions around Teacher Licensure and Assessment within the State Board of Education and the Kansas Department of Education. We want to continue our strong partnership with the State Board of Education and the Kansas Department of Education as we all work together to improve education for all Kansas students.