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Study targets Kansas school districts for merger

COLBY PRESS

TOPEKA (AP) — A 15-month study suggests reorganizing the state's 304 school districts and cutting the number to as low as 255 through mergers.

Consultants from a Denver firm reported their conclusions Wednesday to a joint meeting of the House and Senate Education committees and the State Board of Education. The Legislature ordered the study in 1999 in response to declining enrollments in many dis-

"I may not agree with everything they said, but certainly it moved us in the right direction," said House Education Chairman Ralph Tanner, R-Baldwin City.

The study used two approaches to identify districts on which it said lawmakers should It's the best study I've seen in nine years."

Rep. Jim Morrison, R-Colby and House Education Committee member

focus when discussing boundary changes. One approach identified districts those with low student performance and high per-pupil spend- ones the Legislature has an interest in doing ing, and the other identified those that are too large or too small to be effective.

know it will be handled in a political way," said 900 pupils and have a comparable enrollment John Augenblick of the firm Augenblick & to support them.

Twenty-eight districts were identified as low-performing and high-spending. They are something about, Augenblick said.

The second, size-based approach assumed "This is not a political question, though we that high schools should serve between 100 and

Fifty districts were identified as too small,

24 as too large and two—Wichita and Shawnee Mission — as so large they might need to be broken into smaller districts.

The consultants combined the two approaches and suggested creating 43 new districts and reducing the number to 255 state-

Sue Gamble, a former Shawnee Mission school board member and current state board member, said her district was facing declining enrollment. She expected the numbers to stabilize in the coming years, settling near 25,000.

"It's an aging district," she said, adding that there was little room to build new schools to meet the district's needs. Legislators reacted cautiously to the study but said the information is useful because it is data driven.

The house that Doug built

"It's the best study I've seen in nine years," said Rep. Jim Morrison, R-Colby and member of the House Education Committee. "This gives us options. It points out the problem."

Senate Education Chairman Dwayne Umbarger, R-Thayer, said the correlation between money spent and test scores, as well as school groupings, foretold how accountability may figure into changes in school funding.

"We're not only looking at schools too big, but schools too small," Umbarger said. "Any time you're advocating more school funding. you need to be able to argue why.'

He said he knows school mergers or consolidations are controversial, but they should be explored. "I know there's going to be a lot more questions," he said.

Districts targeted for reorganization

TOPEKA (AP) — Here are the 239; Fowler, 172; Golden Plains, 174; ants hired by the State Board of Education as targets for reorganization.

The consultants, Augenblick and Myers, of Denver, suggested two approaches to identifying districts.

APPROACH ONE (28)

—Districts that have low pupil performance and high per pupil spending, with their student head counts: Belle Plaine, 864; Chase-Raymond, 170; Elkhart, 527; Hanston, 135; Hillcrest, 150; Moscow, 260; Nes Tre La Go, 55; Washington, 370; West Solomon Valley, 74; and Udall 337.

—Districts with higher than expected per pupil spending and lower than average pupil performance for two years: Cedar Vale, 218; Chetopa, 282; Eastern Heights, 183; Elk Valley, 239; Fowler, 172; Herndon, 90; **Tri**plains, 95; and Wathena 424.

—Districts with lower than expected pupil performance in 1998, lower than average performance in 1997 and per pupil spending above the predicted level: Bonner Springs 2,277; Caldwell 338; Kansas City Turner 3,704; Madison-Virgil 285; Mankato 277; Marysville 933; Neodesha 845; Oxford 421; APPROACH TWO (76)

—Districts that are too small with

only one high school:

Ashland, 268; Attica, 135; Bazine, 98; **Brewster, 168;** Burrton, 269; Cedar Vale, 218; Chase-Raymond, 170; Cheylin, 177; Copeland, 121; Dexter, 205; Eastern Heights, 183; Elk Valley,

for reorganizing the state's 304

To help with those changes, the

changes in state law giving more

authority to the State Board of Edu-

Legislature would set two enroll-

ment levels — for example, less than

80 students as of Sept. 20, 2001 and

less than 100 on Sept. 20, 2001.

Those districts would then be tar-

geted for a quick merger with other

Those changes would be:

school districts.

Changes in law recommended

TOPEKA (AP) — A study re- The state board would be respon-

leased Wednesday by a Denver consible for oversight of boundary

sulting firm suggested approaches changes for other targeted districts

consultants also recommended newly consolidated districts, state

-Emergency dissolution. The tricts would decide whether to close

school districts identified by consult- **Grinnell**, 139; Hamilton, 107; Hanston, 135; Haviland, 173; Healy, 125; Herndon, 90; Hillcrest, 150; Jewell, 185; Lewis, 187; Logan, 221. Midway, 226; Montezuma, 234;

Moscow, 260; Mullinville, 93; Nes Tre La Go, 55; North Central, 143; Northern Valley, 188; Palco, 165; Paradise, 158; Pawnee Heights, 168; Prairie Heights, 89; Rolla, 237; Sylvan Grove, 181; Smoky Hill, 141; **Triplains, 95**; Weskan, 132; West Graham-Morland, 66; West Solomon Valley, 74; West Smith County, 208; Wheatland, 182; White Rock, 164.

—Districts that are too small with more than one high school: Axtell, 363; Barnes, 502; Leroy-Gridley, 344; Rural Vista, 461 and Southern Cloud, 242.

-Districts that are too large relative to the number of the high schools they operate: Auburn Washburn, 5,073; Blue Valley, 17,111; Derby, 6,800; Dodge City, 5,507; Emporia, 4,965; Garden City, 7,864; Geary County, 6,463; Goddard, 3,679; Great Bend, 3,245; Hays, 3,398; Haysville, 4,697; Hutchinson, 4,975. Kansas City, 21,173; Kansas City

Turner, 3,704; Lawrence, 10,459; Pleasanton 412 and South Haven 274. Leavenworth, 4,338; Liberal, 4,281; Maize, 5,308; Manhattan, 5,724; Newton, 3,524; Olathe, 20,703; Salina, 7,727 and Topeka Seaman, 3,359.

—Districts that are too large: Shawnee Mission, 30,765; and Wichita Local officials see 2001 as a year of challenge

Source: Augenblick and Myers Inc.; Kansas Department of Education.

not in the emergency dissolution

aid would equal the amount of aid to

the formerly separate districts for

—Closing buildings. Local dis-

The Legislature would direct the

state board to create review proce-

dures for new building construction.

The procedures would consider the

possibility of future district bound-

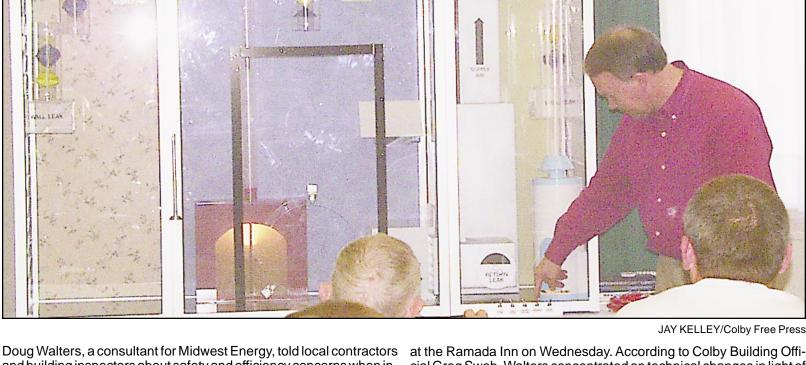
three, four or five years.

–New facilities.

school buildings.

-Hold-harmless clause. For

and building inspectors about safety and efficiency concerns when in-cial Greg Swob, Walters concentrated on technical changes in light of stalling new heating and utility systems in houses. The event was held higher fuel costs.



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

County expecting

nothing unusual; city to hold steady

The following article was researched and written by Patty Decker, Jay Kelley, and Maxine Nelson.

No one has a crystal ball to predict what the future will hold for Thomas County and its residents; however, four local officials did offer insight into what challenges each entity will face

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said the year 2001 will be "a fiscally conservative year."

"The city is going to continue using the talents and abilities of city crews, rather than construction firms, on as many projects as possible to reduce costs," she said.

The issue of retail wheeling, which basically allows municipalities to find their own suppliers, is on the back burner this year.

According to Armstrong, the in-

creasing cost of natural gas is of pri- dairy operations and a processing fa-

the legislature and of the states that have tried retail wheeling, thus far, it hasn't worked as first anticipated.

"We are also working right now on a grant for the city's airport lighting,"

said, "and as other projects become cility," he said. In addition, the ecoavailable we will look for additional funding from grants to help pay partial, if not all, the costs.'

Fulwider

Former Thomas County Commission Chair Glen Kersenbrock said he does not foresee any unusual problems facing the county in 2001, other than the takeover of landfill operations from

"I can't think of anything that will be earthshaking, and hopefully things will go well," Kersenbrock said.

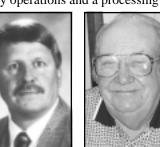
With respect to the landfill, Kersenbrock said the commissioners are encouraging everyone to recycle as much as possible in an effort to keep waste out of the landfill, which in turn would extend its life considerably.

"Thomas County has a small arid landfill exemption and the landfill will remain open as long as it abides with government regulations, which limits waste collection to an average of not more than 20 tons of waste per day," he

While the county and city look at keeping a status quo for the most part, Gerry Fulwider, economic development coordinator for Thomas County, plans to continuing pursuing growth, particularly in the agricultural eco-

"Agriculture and our proximity to I-70 will continue to be strengths for the Colby area," he said.

"The main focus right now is on



Nielsen



Kersenbrock

nomic development alliance has set it he said, "will be accreditation." sights on a new tourist information center.

The center, Fulwider said, would be located on the north side of I-70, near the Range Ave/K-25 exit and is hoped to increase tourist traffic and promote

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's current farm program will expire in 2002 and discussions regarding the new farm bill will be hot topics in the next 12 months, he ex-

"Whatever Congress drafts will have a significant impact on the economic future of our country," Fulwider

area merchants. "As it becomes more difficult for small businesses to compete with Internet sales and major chain stores, expect to see some stores close," he said.

"Yet, new retail business is also

probable.'

Fortunate for the Colby area, according to Fulwider, is that outside investors have confidence in locating here, but the loss of locally-owned business has a significant effect on the community. With the future of small communities being determined by how well they define themselves, Fulwider believes Colby will do well in this area.

He cited investment in new technol-

ogy, teaching methods by the school system and college, and investments in

new health technology as strong assets. "Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County and Puddle Duck pre-school continue to demonstrate our commitment to youth," he added.

"Programs such as these may be the strategic strengths that will provide us a bright home," he said.

Affirming Fulwider's statement on technology, Colby Superintendent Kirk Nielsen said the future does hold an increase in technology and empha-

sis on early childhood programs. "But the biggest challenge in 2001,"

According to Nielsen, the district is in the final year of a five-year cycle

The last accreditation process took place in 1997, he said, and each time the process is conducted, the Northcentral Association looks at improve-

ment plans. As the technology advances in the district, Nielsen said the idea will be to integrate technology more into the local curriculum. He cited ongoing programs to certify Colby students as computer technicians and network and Internet certifications.

'We would also like to see more stu-One area of concern noted was with dents taking advanced classes next year and increasing the scores of all students in the state assessments," he

With regard to childhood programs. the district plans to continue developing professional skills with staff and preparing children ages infant to five

for a school environment. Other things the district would like

- to see happen in 2001 included:
- A district-wide webpage;
- · Ppublic access cable channel for the school system; and
- Continuing to involve parents.

Overall, local officials are cautiously optimistic that 2001 will be a good year.

Briefly

—Boundary change planning. ary changes.

Weather: Maybe a little snow

Cooler temperatures with a very slight chance for precipitation is forecast for the Colby area over the weekend. Until then, however, warm readings will linger.

Tonight, clear skies, lows around 25 and south winds 5-15 mph. Friday, partly sunny, highs near 60 and south winds

Friday night, cloudy, brisk southerly winds 20-30 mph, shifting to the north late, lows around 30 and a 20 percent chance for snow, or an 80 percent chance it won't snow. Saturday, snow chances remain the same with highs around 35. Saturday night and Sunday, snow possible, lows 25 and highs in the 30s. Wednesday's high in Colby was 58 and the overnight low this morning was 21. There was no precipitation during the past 24 hours.

The soil temperature at the four-inch depth is averaging 32 degrees. The records for Jan. 11: 70 in 1953 and -22 in 1918. (The daily temperatures and precipitation are provided by the Northwest Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Assistance to be offered

Rosalie Seemann, former Thomas County Clerk, will be at Meadowlark Manor Senior Center on Monday, Jan. 15, from 10 a.m.-noon to prepare food sales refunds, Homestead refunds and to assist with applications for low income energy assistance applications.

Fair board meeting today

The Thomas County Free Fair Board will meet at 8 p.m. today, at the 4-H Building, to make plans for the 2001 fair. The county commissioners are expected to be in attendance, and election of new fair board officers will take place. The meeting is open to the public.

Free throw contest Sunday

The Knights of Columbus will be hosting its annual free throw contest on Sunday, Jan. 14 at the Colby Elementary School gymnasium on W. 3rd Street in Colby. For information, call Miles Ladenburger at 462-7687 or Dewey Augustine at 462-2924.

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