

Small group of people attend meeting focusing on schools

By GREG STOVER

The Goodland Star-News GOODLAND — Three candidates for the Kansas legislature were in the Goodland school district's office Wednesday night to learn more about education issues they may have to face.

Danny Rasure of Goodland, one of two Republican candidates for the 40th District Senate seat, was there, as was Tim Peterson of Monument, the only Democratic candidate.

John Welsh of Weskan, a candidate for the 118th District House seat currently held by Ralph Ostmeyer, also attended.

Ostmeyer, the other Republican candidate for the District 40 Senate

seat, said he planned to attend a similar meeting in Hays.

About 15 people attended the meeting, sponsored by the Kansas Association of School Boards. They included Goodland School Board president Dick Short, Superintendent Marvin Selby, County Commissioner Kevin Rasure, and Rob Loftin of Weskan, the association's vice president for District 9 and president of the Northwest Kansas Technical College board.

Jim Edwards, governmental relations specialist for the association, led the meeting. After a short introduction, he began an audiovisual briefing about some of the "crucial and controversial" issues in education the Kansas Legislature has to

address.

The briefing started with three things the association said people must consider before they can understand the current issues.

The first is how, and why, the mission of public education has changed in recent years.

The second is the current levels and challenges of school performance, and the third is the processes, and challenges, of school finance and budget.

The mission of public education in Kansas has changed, he said, from simply making programs and courses available to students to demanding that they learn while taking part in them. The state's Quality Performance Accreditation and

the federal "No Child Left Behind" law are major reasons for this change in mission, he said.

The levels and standards of school performance are governed by federal and state laws and regulations.

These include tougher graduation requirements beginning in 2005 passed by the Kansas State Board of Education. Students face increased learning standards while teachers and their aides face tougher certification standards.

The guests were shown how a school district's budget is built, starting with how enrollment figures are calculated and how they determine the amount of a district's general fund. Supplemental funds

were explained along, with the local option budget, based on a local property tax.

School money has increased an average of 6 percent a year since the 1992-1993 school year, an increase of about \$1.4 billion. However, Edwards said, most of this increase went to new costs and not to existing programs. That is why some school districts face cuts in programs and personnel.

Edwards said that Kansas was ranked No. 8 in the country by the National Assessment of Education Progress on student performance in math and readings tests. He said every state that scored better than Kansas spent more money per student

Edwards noted that Kansas had been ranked fifth, and although its test scores increased, scores in other states increased more.

Edwards said Kansas schools are having trouble maintaining an effective teacher force and the state expects a lot of retirements over the next five years. He said Kansas ranked No. 43 in the nation in teacher salary and benefits, down from No. 41 a year ago.

Peterson said the meeting was informative and the data presented well researched.

Welsh said the information was proof that whoever ends up in Topeka after the election will have a tough task ahead in getting education on track.

Child organization offers special bond

By KATHRYN GURFUNKEL

The Goodland Star-News GOODLAND — Ryan Scheopner, 30, and Brandon Sissel, 8, have developed a special bond since their match last January by the Sherman County Big Brothers-Big Sisters program

Brandon was referred to the program, but his mom, Janet Becker, wasn't sure it was right for them. Her skepticism faded when she heard the match would be with Scheopner, an old family friend.

"I did some research on the program, talked to quite a few people," she said. "When they called and said it was him, I said it was OK."

Becker said she feels a big brother helps to support her role as a single mom. She said Scheopner reinforces lessons by serving as a role model when she isn't around.

"I work a lot of weekends," she said. "Ryan is there for the weekends."

Scheopner and Brandon spend their time together playing at the park, enjoying video games or going out to eat. Brandon is a dog

lover and enjoys playing with Scheopner's dogs.

"I get to have real fun with him," he said.

Recently Scheopner, a service technician and part owner at Scheopner's Water Conditioning, a Culligan dealer, took his little brother along on his delivery route.

"I was a Culligan man once," he says with a grin.

They traveled to Burlington, and Brandon got to carry cups and empty water bottles. When they finished, Scheopner took him to the Kit Carson County Carousel and a park.

Their bond not only allows Brandon a chance to have some fun, but Scheopner said, they get serious sometimes. Becker said she's glad her son has a big brother to confide in and to help work through tough times.

Scheopner said he became interested in becoming a big brother while in college in Garden City. When he returned to Goodland, he hooked up with a group of people who wanted to bring the program to Sherman County.

"We felt there was a need," he said.

State agency looks conservatively at new law

TOPEKA (AP) — State officials said Monday they will be conservative about releasing records under a new law that grants the public access to some documents in cases where a foster child dies or is severely injured because of abuse or neglect.

Previously, all foster care records have been closed. The law, which applies to children age 17 or younger, takes effect Thursday.

Officials from the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services said the law is narrow and unclear in places. SRS has asked Attorney General Phill Kline for a legal opinion on several issues, but he is not expected to issue one for several weeks.

SRS Secretary Janet Schalansky said until Kline acts, her agency won't release any record disclosing information from conversations among attorneys, doctors and therapists and their clients. Nor will the agency identify someone who reported a case of suspected abuse or neglect — or even open any record created before Thursday.

"We felt it was very important to be careful about this," Schalansky said during a briefing on the law for reporters. "We are taking a conservative approach."

The state has about 6,100 children in its custody. About 1,000 remain with a parent or guardian un-

der supervision, and the rest have been placed with foster parents, in group homes or otherwise removed from their family homes. SRS officials said Monday that few children — an average of less than one a year — die from abuse and neglect.

Some legislators pushed for changes in Kansas law following the December 2002 death of Brian Edgar, a 9-year-old former foster child who suffocated after his adoptive parents in Overland Park bound him with duct tape and left him overnight.

The adoptive parents and baby sitter were convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

However, the new law does not cover children who already have been adopted or foster children who die in an accident or from disease.

"There will be lots of instances in which case records won't be opened up at all," Schalansky said.

Schalansky said SRS must strike a balance between giving the public access to records and protecting individuals' privacy. For example, she said, a foster child's file often contains information about relatives who were considered as potential guardians for the child but who did not receive custody. Also, Schalansky said, a file also may discuss a parent's per-

sonal history.

John Badger, the agency's chief counsel, said: "Once they're released, you can't go back and unrelease them."

Also, the new law says people affected by the release of records have the right to ask a district judge to keep the documents closed.

Schalansky said SRS will open records after receiving a written request from a news organization or the public, but only after an outside party — a law enforcement agency or a medical examiner, for example — determines that a child died or was severely injured because abuse or neglect.

Woman give false story in recent profile

TOPEKA (AP) — The elderly woman neighbors sometimes saw doing yard work seemed to have an extraordinary past. In one recent newspaper profile, Juanita L. Smith told of surviving the Bataan Death March.

But weeks later, she admitted she'd concocted false World War II experiences. She resigned as director of the Topeka YWCA's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program.

Then, a few days later, authorities removed another woman's decomposed body from Smith's home. Police said Smith herself was hos-

pitalized after being found inside, unresponsive.

"It's hard to make sense of this," Crystal Funk, a neighbor, said Tuesday.

Authorities had not identified the body as of Tuesday. Police Maj. John Sidwell said the task could take days, even several weeks.

Meanwhile, Smith was being treated for a medical condition that police did not disclose. Sidwell said it did not appear to be life-threatening.

According to voter registration records, Juanita Smith, 83, and an-

other woman, Shannon N. Smith, 39, lived at the same address, while driver's license records indicated a Mary Shannon N. Smith lived at the home. Juanita Smith owns the home, according to the county appraiser's office.

Funk said Juanita Smith told people she lived with her daughter, who also acted as a driver.

Funk and another neighbor, Bill Hancock, said Juanita Smith kept to herself, though people saw her tending her yard.

"This whole neighborhood is really close," Funk said. "

Check each issue of the Free Press for additional TV Listings

TV LISTINGS sponsored by the COLBY FREE PRESS

WEEKDAYS JUNE 29 - JULY 5

Table with columns for time slots (6 AM to 11:30) and channels (KLBV/ABC, KSNK/NBC, KBSL/CBS, K15CG, WGN, NICK, FAM, USA, TBS, TNT, DSC, A&E, ESPN, HBO, DISN, MAX).

THURSDAY JULY 1

Table with columns for time slots (6 PM to 11:30) and channels (KLBV/ABC, KSNK/NBC, KBSL/CBS, K15CG, WGN, NICK, FAM, USA, TBS, TNT, DSC, A&E, ESPN, HBO, DISN, MAX).

WEEKDAYS JUNE 29 - JULY 5

Table with columns for time slots (12 PM to 5:30) and channels (KLBV/ABC, KSNK/NBC, KBSL/CBS, K15CG, WGN, NICK, FAM, USA, TBS, TNT, DSC, A&E, ESPN, HBO, DISN, MAX).

FRIDAY JULY 2

Table with columns for time slots (6 PM to 11:30) and channels (KLBV/ABC, KSNK/NBC, KBSL/CBS, K15CG, WGN, NICK, FAM, USA, TBS, TNT, DSC, A&E, ESPN, HBO, DISN, MAX).