

# **PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT**

## **Reviewing Decision-Making at the State Board of Education**

**A Report to the Legislative Post Audit Committee  
By the Legislative Division of Post Audit  
State of Kansas  
March 1999**

# ***Legislative Post Audit Committee***

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## ***Legislative Division of Post Audit***

**THE LEGISLATIVE POST** Audit Committee and its audit agency, the Legislative Division of Post Audit, are the audit arm of Kansas government. The programs and activities of State government now cost about \$8 billion a year. As legislators and administrators try increasingly to allocate tax dollars effectively and make government work more efficiently, they need information to evaluate the work of governmental agencies. The audit work performed by Legislative Post Audit helps provide that information.

We conduct our audit work in accordance with applicable government auditing standards set forth by the U.S. General Accounting Office. These standards pertain to the auditor's professional qualifications, the quality of the audit work, and the characteristics of professional and meaningful reports. The standards also have been endorsed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and adopted by the Legislative Post Audit Committee.

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March 10, 1999

To: Members, Legislative Post Audit Committee

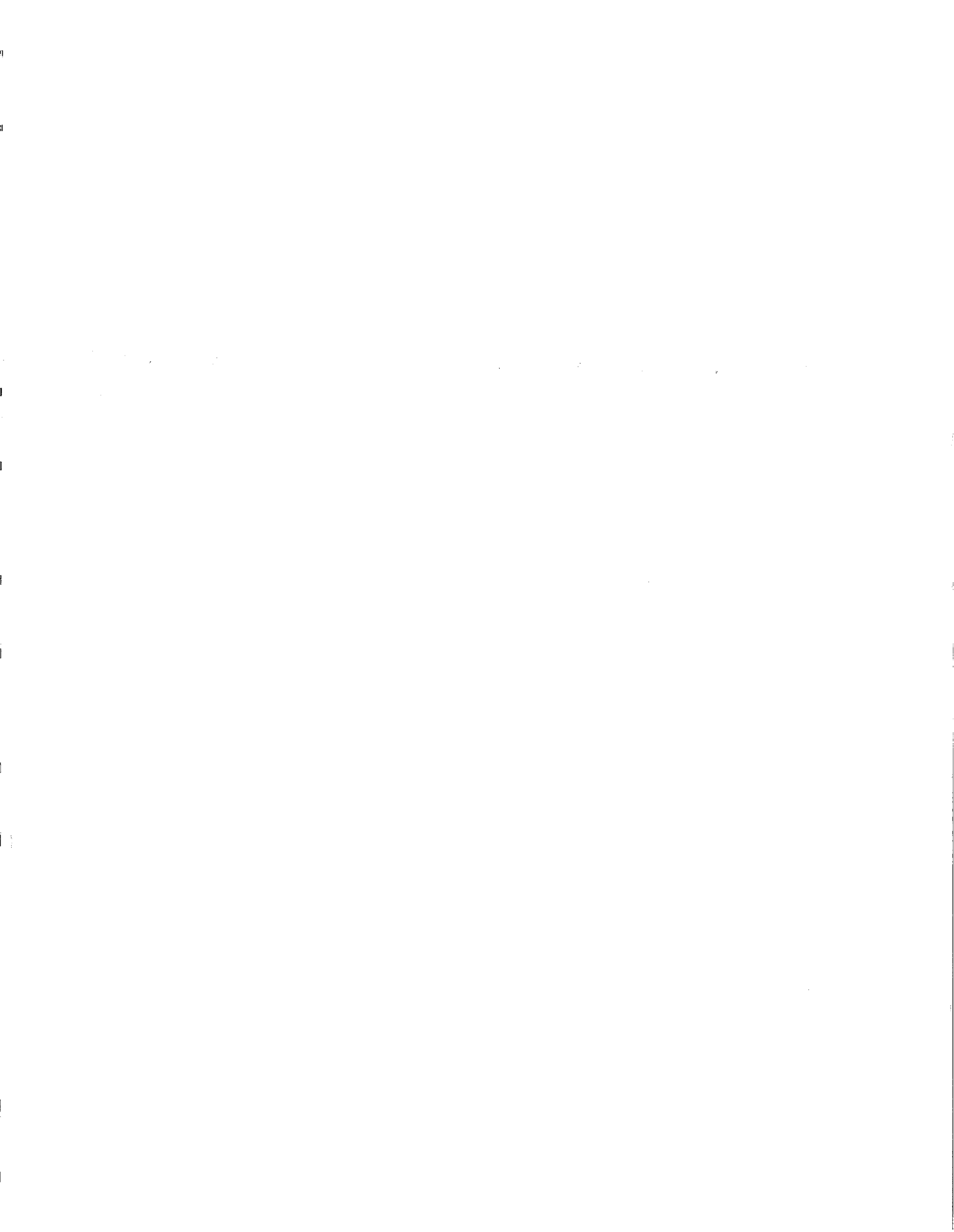
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This report contains the findings from our completed performance audit,  
*Reviewing Decision-Making at the State Board of Education.*

We would be happy to discuss the findings presented in this report with any  
legislative committees, individual legislators, or other State officials.

Barbara J. Hinton  
Legislative Post Auditor



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**LEGISLATIVE DIVISION OF POST AUDIT**

**Question 1: What Major Policy Decisions Has the Board Addressed Recently, Have Significant Decisions Been Delayed Because of Tie Votes, and What Are the Impacts of Tie Votes and Delays?**

**The Board of Education has voted to a tie on several major policy decisions.** ..... page 2  
*The major policy issues addressed by the Board have included student assessments, curriculum standards, and teacher preparation and licensure. In addition, the Board addressed alternative accreditation of non-governmental schools and the School to Work initiative. For each of these issues, Board minutes showed at least one tie vote.*

**The Board's tie votes caused some delays in making policy decisions.** ..... page 3  
*Approval of the curriculum standards for mathematics has been delayed at least eight months. Also, the decision about whether to approve a contract for developing and administering State assessments was delayed about two months because of a tie vote. In addition, several officials told us the proposed new requirements for teacher certification have been delayed. These proposed requirements have been under development since 1992; were considered, but not approved on a tie vote in January 1998; and were put on the Board's agenda again in October 1998.*

**The impact of these delays has been mainly on the attitudes and perceptions of the State's educators.** ..... page 4  
*The fiscal impact of tie votes and related delays in decisions appears to be limited. However, the people in the educational community we talked with used the words "consternation," "frustration," and "anxiety" when they described the impacts of Board votes on such major issues as State assessments, curriculum standards, and the redesign of teacher education and licensure. On another issue, School to Work activities could be hampered because the budget the Board approved doesn't include positions promised in the State's grant application.*

**The Board has taken some steps to move forward on a couple of the major issues.** ..... page 5  
*Overall, most people we spoke noted that there is a concentrated effort by Board members to work together. The Board formed a subcommittee to determine what specific provisions of the draft teacher education redesign document were causing the Board to logjam. New mathematics curriculum standards are expected to be approved this spring.*

**APPENDIX A: Agency Response** ..... page 12

This audit was conducted by Laurel Murdie and Jill Shelley. Randy Tongier was the audit manager. If you need any additional information about the audit's findings, please contact Ms. Murdie at the Division's offices. Our address is: Legislative Division of Post Audit, 800 SW Jackson Street, Suite 1200, Topeka, Kansas 66612. You also may call (785) 296-3792, or contact us via the Internet at: **LPA@mail.ksleg.state.ks.us.**



## **Reviewing Decision-Making at the State Board of Education**

The State Board of Education, which has 10 elected members, is responsible for setting public school policy in Kansas. The Board must certify teachers and administrators, approve teacher education programs, administer large State and federal aid programs, and establish standard courses of study in the public schools. Its decisions affect elementary and secondary schools, the community colleges, and vocational schools and technical colleges.

Recently, legislators have expressed concern that philosophical differences among Board members, resulting in several split votes, have delayed action on matters before the Board. To address this concern, the Legislative Post Audit Committee authorized a performance audit of the Kansas State Board of Education.

This performance audit answers the following questions:

- 1. What major policy decisions has the State Board of Education addressed recently, and have significant decisions been delayed or changed because of tie votes?**
- 2. What additional costs or other problems may have been caused by delays attributable to split decisions or tie votes?**

For reporting purposes, we have combined these two questions.

To answer these questions, we reviewed Board minutes to determine which of the major issues addressed by the Board had resulted in a tie vote, as well as to determine any progress made after those tie votes. We also interviewed Department employees and Board members. In addition, we contacted representatives of school and teacher associations and staff from several local school districts to determine whether they thought the Board's tie votes caused delays or had some impact on their school districts.

In conducting this audit work, we followed all applicable government auditing standards set forth by the U.S. General Accounting Office.

## **What Major Policy Decisions Has the Board Addressed Recently, Have Significant Decisions Been Delayed Because of Tie Votes, and What are the Impacts of Tie Votes and Delays?**

Several major policy decisions have been delayed because of tie votes by the Board of Education. These decisions involve adoption of mathematics curriculum standards, approval of a contract for writing student assessments required by State law, and requirements for teacher certification. Although the fiscal impact of these delays has been minimal, the people in the educational community we talked with consistently mentioned frustration as a cost of the tie votes and delays. Overall, most people we spoke with during this audit noted that there is a concentrated effort by the current Board members to work together.

### **The Board of Education Has Voted to a Tie On Several Major Policy Decisions**

Early in our audit work, we asked Board members and Department staff to help us identify the major policy issues addressed by the Board over the past two years. We've listed those issues in the paragraphs below. For each issue, the Board minutes showed at least one tie vote.

- **Student assessments:** State law requires schools to assess students' knowledge in the areas of mathematics, science, reading, writing, and social studies. The Board is responsible for establishing standards and providing Statewide assessment materials for schools to use.
- **Curriculum standards:** Curriculum standards specify what students at certain grade levels should know and understand in the following subject areas--mathematics, science, social studies, the reading and writing aspects of communication arts, and the speaking, listening, and viewing aspects of communication arts. The Board is responsible for establishing State curriculum standards.
- **Teacher Preparation and Licensure:** Accredited schools are required to hire teachers the State says are qualified to teach subjects at specified grade levels. The State Board determines those qualifications.
- **Alternative Accreditation of Non-Governmental Schools:** In order to be accredited, Kansas schools must meet State standards adopted by the Board. Several times during the past two years, the Board has been asked to consider granting State accreditation to non-governmental schools, such as parochial schools, that meet other accreditation standards. Those other standards would be set by alternative accrediting bodies, such as a religious-affiliated group.



### The Board Has Had Other Tie Votes

The five issues we've highlighted for this audit aren't the only ones on which the Board has deadlocked in the past two years. A review of the minutes found these other examples:

- An applicant who had a felony conviction within the previous five years requested an initial teaching certificate. Although State law now requires a five-year wait between a felony and a teaching certificate, the Professional Practices Commission and the Board had discretion in this case because that law wasn't in effect when the application was received. The Professional Practices Commission recommended issuing the certificate. The Board accepted the Commission's findings of fact the first month this topic was on the agenda, but a motion to deny the application failed 5-5. At the next meeting, the Board denied the application.
- The Board developed a new mission statement at its March 1998 planning meeting, but a vote to approve that mission statement failed 5-5 at the May meeting. That mission statement read, "The Kansas State Board of Education promotes student academic achievement by providing educational vision, leadership, opportunity, accountability and advocacy for all Kansans." The mission statement debated at a Board retreat in February 1999 and approved at the Board's meeting that month was identical except that it omits "Kansans."
- The May 1998 meeting had to proceed item-by-item without an approved agenda. The vote to approve the agenda failed 5-5 when a member questioned a panel presentation on qualified admissions, saying the topic hadn't been among the study topics agreed upon earlier. Later in the meeting, a motion to approve the agenda for that meeting and to discuss formulating agendas at the June meeting, also failed 5-5.

- **Board and Department Involvement with the School to Work initiative:** The federally funded School to Work initiative attempts to integrate education and preparation for joining the workforce. The Governor has designated the Department of Education to administer the federal moneys the State receives for the Program. As part of its review and approval of the Department's budget, the Board must approve employee positions for the Program.

In its response to a draft of this report, the Board pointed out that it had considered a number of issues during the past two years on which it didn't have tie votes. Nevertheless, the five policy issues listed above were the only issues consistently identified by the Board members and others as the major policy issues before the Board in our review period.

### The Board's Tie Votes Have Caused Some Delays in Making Policy Decisions

Once we identified the major policy decisions for which the Board reached a tie vote, we reviewed those decisions to see if the tie votes resulted in delays of policy decisions. The key results of our review are presented below. More detail on the policy decisions, votes, issues, and related matters is provided in the tables starting on page 6.

- *Approval of the curriculum standards for mathematics has been delayed at least eight months.* The Board had adopted a timetable for revising and approving three of the five curriculum standards areas. That timetable called for approval and adoption of the mathematics standards by June 1998. The vote to adopt the proposed mathematics standards resulted in a tie. Various officials we talked to during this audit anticipate that the adoption of these standards will have been delayed for about a year by the time they're approved. (The Board did adopt curriculum standards for writing and reading on schedule in June 1998.)
- *The decision about whether to approve a contract for developing and administering State assessments was delayed about two months because of a tie vote.* The contract was up for renewal in June 1997. When the contract wasn't approved on a tie vote, the assessment process was up in the air for a time. However, we couldn't determine that the development of new student assessments was delayed, and assessments were given on time for the 1997-1998 school year.
- *Proposed new requirements for teacher certification, under development since 1992 and considered but not approved on a tie vote in January 1998, weren't put on the Board's agenda again until October 1998.* Although no specific timetable is in place for approval of these requirements, several officials we talked with during the audit told us approval of these requirements has been delayed.

**The Impact of These Delays Has Been  
Mainly on the Attitudes and Perceptions  
Of the State's Educators**

To assess the impact of any delays associated with the Board's tie votes, and of the tie votes themselves, we looked for potential fiscal impact and any other impacts.

**The fiscal impact of tie votes and related delays in decisions appears to be limited.** Actual additional costs seem to be those incurred in holding a Board retreat in August 1997. The retreat was designed to help the Board work through impasses on assessments and curriculum standards. Department officials told us the costs of that retreat were about \$10,000. A potential fiscal impact on school districts would arise if the timetable for implementing new curriculum standards called for the purchase of an abundance of new instructional materials all at once. School officials indicated this could have a significant impact. However, it's not clear at this time whether that's going to happen.

**The Department budget the Board approved doesn't have the personnel "promised" in the State's School to Work grant agreement.** In applying for this federal funding, the Department indicated that it would have a Statewide project director and a consultant. Because of some Board members' opposition to School to Work, those positions haven't been included in the Department's budget. However, a consultant currently directs Statewide School to Work activities. There is concern that, without both the consultant and coordinator, activities could be hampered.

**We also found that there's a sense of frustration among the State's educators stemming from tie votes and related delays.** The tie votes are seen by some as a lack of decision-making, resulting in uncertainty for local educators on issues such as which instructional materials to choose to best match State standards, and what additional education they need. People we talked with used the words "consternation," "frustration," and "anxiety" when they described the impacts of Board votes on such major issues as State assessments, curriculum standards, and the redesign of teacher education and licensure.

#### **The Board Has Taken Some Steps to Move Forward on a Couple of the Major Issues**

The Board has taken some steps to move forward on the two issues that have generated the most discussion: curriculum standards and the redesign of teacher certification requirements. For example, the Board formed a subcommittee to determine what specific provisions of the draft teacher education redesign document were causing the Board to logjam. It is expected that this subcommittee will present a proposal on this issue within the next few months, and that the Board may approve the document in May 1999. New mathematics curriculum standards are expected to be approved this spring as well.

Another step that seems to show that the Board is moving forward is that the Board adopted a mission statement and goals at its February meeting. Overall, most people we spoke with during this audit noted that there is a concentrated effort by Board members to work together, and they anticipate that the Board will progress on significant issues.

<b>Student Assessments</b>										
Background information:	State law requires school districts to assess students' knowledge in mathematics, science, reading, writing, and social studies. The Center for Education Testing and Evaluation at the University of Kansas had provided these assessments for about 20 years. Since 1989, those assessments have included both objective portions and performance portions, which are experiments, essay questions, and the like. In 1997, Board members disagreed over whether to continue performance assessments for curriculum areas other than writing.									
Significant votes:	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>June 1997:</td> <td>Failed to approve the on-going contract for the State assessments.</td> <td>Vote: 5-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July 1997:</td> <td>Failed to pass a motion which would have allowed current State assessments (with both objective and performance portions) to be administered for 1997-1998.</td> <td>Vote: 5-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August 1997:</td> <td>Approved allowing the Commissioner to contract for State assessments</td> <td>Vote: 10-0</td> </tr> </table>	June 1997:	Failed to approve the on-going contract for the State assessments.	Vote: 5-5	July 1997:	Failed to pass a motion which would have allowed current State assessments (with both objective and performance portions) to be administered for 1997-1998.	Vote: 5-5	August 1997:	Approved allowing the Commissioner to contract for State assessments	Vote: 10-0
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What are the issues of concern?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Scope of assessments and testing methods:</b> According to Board minutes, Board members' viewpoints differed on several issues, including which assessments to require at which grade levels, what subject matter should be included in the social studies assessments, and whether to allow students to use calculators and word processors during assessments.</li> </ul>									
People told us about impacts caused by the tie votes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delays in decisions.</b> Delays in approving assessment contracts can lead to delays in developing new assessments.</li> <li>• <b>Disruption of local activities.</b> Board votes in June and July 1997 caused uncertainty about the future of State assessments. Local educators wrote letters expressing concern that discontinuing the assessments could weaken their improvement efforts and affect accreditation.</li> <li>• <b>Uncertainty over effects on accreditation.</b> Schools need assessment data to prove progress for accreditation. When the performance component was removed from most assessments, schools were uncertain how to document improvement in order to retain accreditation.</li> </ul>									
Progress:	In August 1997, the Board voted to have the Commissioner contract with the Center for the assessments. Assessments have been given on schedule every year. The Board has approved a schedule for giving assessments in specified curricular areas. Assessments based on the new mathematics, reading, and writing standards are expected in Spring 2000, with other new assessments in subsequent years.									

<b>Curriculum Standards</b>							
Background information:	As a result of the discussion of student assessments in the summer of 1997, Board members voted to have committees of educators and other stakeholders develop new curriculum standards for mathematics, science, reading, writing, and social studies over two years. Previously, other committees had reviewed these more-or-less continually, "tweaking" the existing standards. The new standards are expected to be substantially different than the old standards.						
Significant votes:	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">June 1998</td> <td style="width: 60%;">Didn't accept the proposed mathematics standards</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: right;">Vote: 5-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 1998</td> <td>Adopted the proposed standards in reading and writing</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Vote: 9-1</td> </tr> </table>	June 1998	Didn't accept the proposed mathematics standards	Vote: 5-5	June 1998	Adopted the proposed standards in reading and writing	Vote: 9-1
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What are the issues of concern?	<p><b>Board members had differing views about issues involving the new mathematics standards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some Board members want to develop mathematics standards for each grade, including kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, others Board members don't</li> <li>• Board members' views differ on when it's appropriate for students to use calculators</li> </ul>						
People told us about impacts caused by the tie votes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delay in adopting mathematics standards.</b> Nearly everyone we talked with during this audit told us the new mathematics curriculum standards are about one year behind schedule.</li> <li>• <b>Decline in educator morale.</b> Teachers and others who invested much time and energy in developing the new mathematics standards were discouraged when the proposed standards were rejected, and they may be reluctant to work on future projects.</li> <li>• <b>Stronger and better standards.</b> The new curriculum standards will be better than the earlier ones, regardless of any delays.</li> <li>• <b>Disruption of local schools' schedules for standard setting.</b> Local schools align their standards with State standards, and many do so in a continuous cycle. Delays in adopting State standards disrupt this cycle.</li> <li>• <b>Disruption of local schools' planning for instructional purchases.</b> Delayed adoption of mathematics standards may result in several standards being changed at about the same time—this can lead to other problems. For instance, several people we talked with told us that having several standards change at about the same time not only makes it difficult for schools to adjust their curricula, but also makes it difficult to budget for appropriate instructional materials.</li> </ul>						
Progress:	Curriculum standards committees continue their work. All are on the schedule Department staff predicted except mathematics. People told us they expect the mathematics standards to be approved this Spring.						

<b>Redesign of Teacher Certification and Licensure</b>	
Background information:	In 1992, the Board charged the Teaching and School Administration Professional Standards Board (an advisory board) "to develop a plan for the redesign of educator preparation and licensure consistent with the spirit and intent of the Kansas Quality Performance Accreditation System." This was the first proposed major change in teacher certification regulations for more than a decade. Statewide hearings were held in 1993 and 1997, and the Board received the proposal in May 1997. The Professional Standards Board's proposed licensure regulations included changing the long-standing system of certification plus endorsements. (An endorsement identifies the level and field or subject a person is entitled to teach.)
Significant votes:	January 1998      The Board's vote didn't support the proposed regulations      Vote: 5-5
What are the issues of concern?	<p><b>The draft plan proposed significant changes. Some Board members supported these changes, others didn't. The draft plan included changes in these areas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reduction in the number of certificate endorsement areas (from over 300 to less than 40)</li> <li>• Out-of-state teaching certificates</li> <li>• Assessments for new teachers</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent and educator concerns.</b> Board files contain many letters from parents and educators expressing concerns about proposed changes in teaching areas or levels (endorsements), especially for teachers of gifted students, reading specialist, media specialist, school social worker, and school nurse.</p>
People told us about impacts caused by the tie votes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Current requirements remain in effect.</b> Delay on adopting a proposal has no effect because Kansas continues with the old certification requirements.</li> <li>• <b>Better requirements.</b> Additional debate has allowed certain aspects of the original proposal to be improved.</li> <li>• <b>Lessened cooperation from educators.</b> When the Board rejected the proposal, it lost credibility and showed disrespect to the hundreds of people who spent many hours on the proposal. Many of those people were discouraged, and they may be reluctant to work on future projects. This slows momentum for educational improvements.</li> <li>• <b>The tie vote caused a delay in adopting new teacher certification and licensing standards, which in turn has caused the following impacts:</b> Kansas is behind other states in redesigning its certification standards, teacher certification requirements are out of step with the whole school improvement process. In addition, teacher preparation isn't current. Teaching students are being taught based on research that's 15-20 years old, and teachers are delaying updating their skills—waiting for the approval of the new regulations.</li> </ul>
Progress:	Board subcommittees were formed in October 1998 and in January 1999 (including new members) to work on areas of disagreement and develop a compromise proposal.

<b>Alternative Accreditation for Non-Governmental Schools</b>	
Background information:	The Board has been asked three times since late 1996 to consider steps toward granting State accreditation to schools that meet the standards of alternative accrediting bodies, such as denominational accrediting bodies or the Association of Christian Schools International. Non-government schools want State accreditation for several reasons, including having teaching experience in their schools count toward State certification requirements and having their students participate in activities regulated by the Kansas State High School Activities Association.
Significant votes:	<p>June 1997    Didn't approve naming a task force to develop alternative accreditation for non-government elementary and secondary schools    Vote: 5-5</p> <p>June 1997    Didn't approve allowing the Board Chair to work with the Kansas State High School Activities Association to accommodate non-public schools that aren't accredited by the State    Vote: 5-5</p> <p>November 1998    Didn't approve having the Commissioner and staff develop and submit to the Board regulations to allow non-public schools to be granted State accreditation through alternative accrediting organizations. The Board would have had to approve those organizations.    Vote: 5-4</p>
What are the issues of concern?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•    <b>Treat all the same.</b> Some officials told us all schools wanting accreditation from the State should follow the accreditation standards currently in State law.</li> <li>•    <b>Other standards are as high.</b> Other officials told us the State should grant State accreditation through alternative accrediting organizations that the Board approves. The accreditation standards of other organizations are strict enough to meet state standards, and meeting both is duplicative and increases costs for non-government schools.</li> <li>•    <b>Kansas is out of step.</b> We were also told that many other states allow alternative accreditation.</li> </ul>
People told us about impacts caused by the tie votes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•    <b>State law remains the same.</b> All schools that want to be State-accredited must meet Quality Performance Accreditation standards.</li> </ul>
Progress:	No further action was taken on this issue.

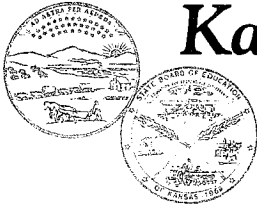
<b>School to Work/School to Careers</b>										
Background information:	Under the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, states receive federal funds to integrate school-based and work-based activities, to integrate academic and technical education, and to link secondary and post-secondary education. Kansas first received moneys in 1994 and in 1998 received \$16.8 million for four years. The Kansas program is known as School to Careers, and its activities are overseen by the Kansas Workforce Investment Partnership. According to federal law, the Governor determines what agency will administer the grant. In 1995, the Governor moved the fiscal administration of School to Careers from the Department of Human Resources to the Department of Education.									
Significant votes:	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">September 1998</td> <td style="width: 55%;">Failed to remove School to Work from the fiscal year 2000 budget</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: right;">Vote: 5-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>September 1998</td> <td>Failed to accept the budget including School to Work</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Vote: 5-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>September 1998</td> <td>Approved the budget including School to Work but draft a letter asking the Governor to send School to Work to a different department</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Vote: 6-4</td> </tr> </table>	September 1998	Failed to remove School to Work from the fiscal year 2000 budget	Vote: 5-5	September 1998	Failed to accept the budget including School to Work	Vote: 5-5	September 1998	Approved the budget including School to Work but draft a letter asking the Governor to send School to Work to a different department	Vote: 6-4
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What are the issues of concern?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of input.</b> Some officials are concerned about School to Careers because it was assigned to the Department of Education without any input from the Board or the Legislature. In addition, because the Board can't make any policy decisions about School to Careers, even though the moneys are in the Department's budget, some Board members want School to Careers moved.</li> <li>• <b>State responsibility.</b> Other officials think School to Careers is federal intrusion into the State's education system.</li> <li>• <b>Career tracking.</b> Still other people told us School to Careers forces career choices too early in life, such as a choice between college and a technical career.</li> <li>• <b>Student retention.</b> We were also told that School to Career activities keep students in school.</li> </ul>									
People told us about impacts caused by the tie votes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No impact.</b> Activities would continue if the grant were administered by another department.</li> <li>• <b>Programmatic impact:</b> The Board can determine whether to use Department of Education positions for School to Careers activities. The Board hasn't decided whether it will allow Department positions to be used for the proposed Statewide coordinator and a consultant. If grant administration stays with the Department of Education, activities could suffer without these positions.</li> <li>• <b>Reduced cooperation.</b> Moving the program to a different State agency would reduce cooperation between education and business.</li> </ul>									
Progress:	As of the writing of this report, the Governor had taken no action on the Board's request to have a different department administer this program. School to Careers activities continue.									



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Agency Response**

On March 4, we provided copies of the draft audit report to the chair and two members of the Kansas State Board of Education. The Board's response is included as this appendix.



# Kansas State Board of Education

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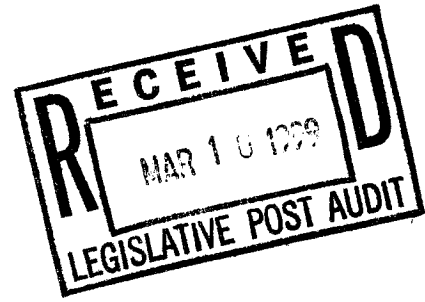
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March 10, 1999

Ms. Barbara Hinton  
Legislative Post Auditor  
Mercantile Bank Tower  
800 S. W. Jackson Street, Suite 1200  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-2212



Dear Ms. Hinton,

I first want to express the State Board's appreciation for the courtesy and professional manner in which the audit was conducted and the opportunity to review the draft of the audit report on the Kansas State Board of Education. We hope that the report will provide useful information to the Kansas Legislature.

The Kansas State Board of Education is charged with general supervision of the institutions that have been assigned to it. Because the board oversees the elementary and secondary schools, the area vocational technical schools and colleges, and the community colleges, it reviews and acts on a broad range of policy issues. As indicated in your report, over the past two years, the State Board has been considering a number of policy issues which have captured both state and national attention. At the heart of these issues is a diversity of opinion.

As indicated in your report, the State Board has not been able on the initial votes on some of these issues to find a majority of support for a policy direction. However, the State Board has worked through nearly all of these issues to either find a majority of support for a policy or continue to find ways to address this diversity of opinion to reach a compromise that will ultimately gain the majority support. Also, it must be noted that on the vast number of issues upon which the State Board has acted, a majority opinion has been found. For example, the State Board has supported changes in accreditation regulations and approved revisions to reading and writing standards. Additionally, the board developed a quality control policy to ensure that state standards and assessments have external review. The board has made reading improvement a priority and is advocating for a program to diagnose reading problems early in a child's schooling, sponsoring reading conferences, and developing a resource on best practices for educators and parents. The board has agreed to a more aggressive policy on seeking additional national and international data on student achievement by participating in the

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National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment program and by seeking funding to participate in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study Revised. Further, the board has approved a policy agenda for postsecondary education and an articulation agreement between the community colleges and Regents institutions.

Obviously, these are only a few examples of the variety of issues upon which the board has found a majority of support. In fact, during the 1997 and 1998 calendar years, the State Board voted on over 800 issues with only 38 resulting in a tie vote.

We believe that the State Board's deliberations over the past two years have been reflective not only of the diversity of opinions on important educational issues but also a testimony to the commitment of the board to find ways to resolve differences of opinion for the benefit of students in Kansas. We are also proud of the fact that Kansas students continue to improve their achievement as reflected in the state assessment program, the American College Testing program, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to include these thoughts with your report.

Sincerely,



Linda Holloway, Chair  
State Board of Education

