Balance requires strength
In this Legislative session, schools and teachers have dealt with issues like due process and probationary periods, teacher retirement and the health of the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System (KPERS) and the freedom to make political contributions.

Now, lawmakers are taking up the budget. KNEA members shared strong advice during an online survey (see www.knea.org) and it all comes down to funding Kansas public schools.

“Fund public schools, and quit dishing out tax breaks to big corporations, who have NOT created new jobs,” said Dr. John Jenkinson, Butler Community College.

“Do the right thing! It seems as if you are trying to show the courts that you are the bosses. Unfortunately, the kids are the ones who will be the losers in this battle,” said Jennifer Keys, United Teachers of Wichita.

Making your voice heard – your phone calls, communications via Facebook, your e-mails, online petitions and actual typed letters - makes a difference as KNEA and partners advocate for teacher rights and school funding.

In Hays, Colby, Lawrence, Abilene, Fort Scott and Iola, members are attending chamber events, egg and issues and legislative forums.

In the northeast, teachers are meeting with school board members to partner in advocating for public schools at the state level AND to measure their support for teacher/student issues at the local level.

Independence and Labette County members have started a “Red Shirt Society” as public school advocates across the state wear red every Tuesday to support Kansas public education.

KNEA members are discovering if the person for whom they voted for in November is representing them well ... or not. UTW members invited politicians to a Q&A and only one lawmaker, Representative Jo Ann Pottorff (R) attended.

Colleagues in Wisconsin, Iowa and Idaho, where collective bargaining rights are threatened, are being contacted and supported by KNEA members.

Members are channeling their frustration with politicians in many ways. For example, see Hays NEA member Cheryl Shepherd-Adams’ video called, So what good is a union, anyway? on KNEA’s Facebook page.

Stay informed online and in person
Readership for KNEA's legislative update, Under the Dome, has nearly doubled from last year. Sign up at knea.org to get daily updates, to hear the outrageous and about the courageous.

Follow what’s happening on KNEA’s Facebook page or on Twitter (@kneanews). Shawnee Mission and Topeka area teachers came to Topeka this past week to lobby. You can, too!

Contacting your policy-makers
Regardless if you’re contacting a state legislator or a school board member by phone, in person, via e-mail or letter, remember:

Be prepared. Know your position and the rationale for that position. Share what is happening to children and professionals in the classrooms in your school and district.

Be calm. The better prepared you are in terms of having background information and rationale for a position, the better you will be able to maintain a professional demeanor.

Don’t give up. Continue to keep your legislator informed about the impact of an issue, even after it has passed. If they voted to support a program that works, let them know how it works. If they opposed a program that wasn’t enacted, let them know the need still exists.

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KNEA member receives $5,000 NEA Student Achievement Grant

Sondra “Sandy” Groene, Lawrence EA, recently received a $5,000 Student Achievement Grant from the NEA Foundation, the grant-giving arm of the National Education Association.

Groene’s grant will allow her, working with Schwegler Elementary resource teacher Ryan Ellett (pictured with Sondra above), to take students to Kansas’ Tallgrass Prairie, where they will work to understand the historic and cultural importance of the ecosystem.

“The project will enable students to engage in community learning while discovering the relevance of local geography,” Groene said. “After visiting the prairie, students will create a large prairie mural that will be shared with the community.”

Groene’s grant was awarded in collaboration and with support from Nickelodeon, the network whose program — The Big Help — works to connect kids with issues considered important in their lives.

The NEA Foundation awarded 50 grants in 33 states, for a total of $211,000 this year. Winners were selected based on the quality of their proposed ideas and the projects’ potential for enhancing student achievement.

More KNEA members earn grants - have you applied?

These members visited www.neafoundation.org

Sue Stinson, a k-5 teacher in Overland Park, received a NEA Learning & Leadership Grant so a professional learning community consisting of physical education teachers and classroom teachers from five schools could study various ways to include movement in the everyday core curriculum. The resulting tools have been used to train teachers in schools throughout the district.

Amy Miller, a 6-8 grade computer/technology teacher in Derby, earned a NEA Student Achievement Grant to help eighth grade gifted students research and learn writing, editing and presentation skills while choosing a career. Students observed professionals at work and examined college entrance and graduation requirements. Using new technology, students presented their career paths to assemblies of students and parents.

Do you know KNEA members who have been recognized, or deserve to be recognized, for exemplary teaching or leadership? Please send the specifics to kneanews@knea.org.
The way Kansas assesses students is changing, and it will impact every subject area. Expect to see changes starting in 2012. The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) expects the new assessments to be fully implemented by 2015.

**SMARter Balanced**

In the March edition of *Issues 2.0*, Kansas Commissioner of Education Diane DeBacker noted that Kansas is one of the 48 states to adopt the Common Core Standards and is part of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, a group of 30 states that have the same standards in content areas. *(Find the full article at knea.org)*

Adopting these common standards ensures rigorous and internationally benchmarked standards for Kansas students aligned with college and career readiness expectations.

Adopting standards in alignment with other states also allows Kansas to pool resources with those states and to capitalize on the successful programs and strategies being used.

These SMARTER Balanced states are determining the next generation of assessments, DeBacker said. The next generation of assessments are to identify growth at four levels: the individual student, the school, the district as we know it in Kansas and the state.

While the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) will spell out specifics, the Kansas plan calls for phasing new standards and assessments starting in 2012.

Already, information on the Common Core Standards is being shared so educators can understand them and school districts can determine how to realign curriculum based on them.

Like the previous standards, the Kansas Common Core Standards in Mathematics and in English Language Arts and Literacy provide an expectation for what Kansas students should know and be able to do by the end of specific grade levels.

Although they do not represent all that students need to learn in these content areas, they do represent essential steps toward student success.

**Resources**

The KSDE Web site has resources relative to the Kansas Common Core Standards at www.ksde.org.

Scroll to the very bottom of the list of “Related Sites/Information” in the gold-colored box along the right-hand side of the page to access the information.

Also, the page can be accessed directly at http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=4605.

Highlights of general resources currently available include:

- **Transition Timeline** – a one-page overview of Kansas’ plan to transition from our previous standards to the Kansas Common Core Standards.
- **Transition Monthly Schedule** – a more detailed overview of the month-to-month KSDE activities designed to create a seamless transition to the Kansas Common Core Standards.

**Kansas Common Core Webinars**

A series of webinars will be offered during May on the Kansas Common Core Standards in Mathematics and in English Language Arts.

Find a list of the dates, times and topics at both the KNEA and KSDE Web sites.

**Common Core Standards Summer Academy**

KSDE will host six summer academies focusing on the Kansas Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and in Mathematics.

Registration for the summer academy will be $120 and the dates and locations for this year’s academies will be posted online as soon as possible.

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**KSDE Learning Services Newsletter**


If you have questions about how the new standards will impact your teaching, on the process or on the standards themselves, contact KNEA’s Director of Instructional Advocacy Peg Dunlap (peg.dunlap@knea.org) or KSDE’s Jeannette Nobo at jnobo@ksde.org.

**Make assessments “real”**

The Kansas State Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) approved the McPherson School District using the ACT for middle and high school student assessments this year. While the district still must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), this opens the way to making assessments real and meaningful for students.

This is the first time, the USDE is showing flexibility on how districts assess students.

The Kansas State Board of Education submitted a request to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to allow Kansas to keep the AYP targets for reading and math accountability at the 2009-2010 levels.

State Board Chairman Dave Dennis said Kansas has demonstrated continued commitment to education reforms, specifically mentioning the adoption of the Common Core Standards and Kansas’ participation in the SMARTER Balanced Consortium to implement higher standards and plan for the next generation of assessments.

It takes a tremendous amount of dedication and work on the part of teachers, students and parents to prepare for state assessments. KNEA continues to work with KSDE to make the state assessments meaningful for students and teachers alike.
Meet Matt Brenzikofer
Clay County EA
“KNEA supports what is best of all students, for all teachers, for education. EDUCATION is the FOCUS! I appreciate the advocacy for teachers and students in the Kansas Legislature ... and the trainings provided by KNEA staff.”

How did you celebrate Read Across?

Lawrence Education Association member Michele Duncan’s second grade class had a Green Eggs and Ham breakfast, used “yertles” for an estimation activity and (at right) put together puzzles to celebrate Dr. Seuss’ birthday. What did you do?

Across Kansas there were read-ins, poetry slams and other activities to celebrate reading. In places like Leoti, high school students go to the elementary schools and read to the little kids every year. Everyone wears Dr. Seuss hats and teachers, administrators and even business people dress up like the Cat in the Hat.

Many educators combined Read Across Kansas with the Kansas Quinticentennial this year.

At Pray-Woodman Elementary in Maize, for example, students kept track of books read between January 5 and March 2 (Dr. Seuss’ birthday). Conestoga wagons for each grade level were placed on a map of Kansas and moved across the state a corresponding number of miles for each point earned. KNEA member Sheryl Connell said students actually wound up reading through Kansas, Missouri and Illinois.

Fifth grade teacher Shelly Huser, Victoria, is one of the many who invited “mystery readers” to class during the Read Across Kansas week.

In Meriden, Jan Wells’ 4th grade class met with Ms. Naugle’s 4th grade in Los Angeles via Skype. Together, the classes read books with younger students, read the Cat in the Hat and listened to guest readers in person and via Skype.

Share what you did at by e-mailing kneanews@knea.org or post your activities at www.readacrossamerica.org.

Share your photos on Flickr and your reading video on the SchoolTube Read Across America site!

Summer might mean reading, maybe a part-time job or more time with your own kids. A school break doesn’t mean the learning has to stop for you.

Whether you’re a new or veteran teacher or an education support professional, the NEA Academy will meet your needs for professional development or continuing education credits.

The NEA Academy (www.neacademy.org/) has a variety of peer-approved, high quality courses on the NEA Academy Web site and offerings are constantly increasing. NEA has outstanding resources for summer learning – from swapping places with a teacher to chaperoning a field trip.

Regardless of what you do, inspired travel and innovative professional development mean you can return recharged in August.