



Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

Episode 5 – Civic Engagement

Intro:

You're listening to the Kansas State Department of

Education Insight podcast, where we bring you conversations and information on our vision to lead the world in the success of each student.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Hello, Kansas, educators and really everyone that's interested in education across Kansas.

Welcome to episode five of our Cast Insight podcast. I'm Randy Watson, Commissioner of Education. Wow. Episode five and we seems like we just got started in some ways and other ways. Seems like we've been with you for a long time.

That's, I guess, is the hallmark of a good podcast. Every episode seems brand new, and yet we've seen like we've been been talking with with you for quite a while. Our topic this month is civic engagement, one of the top board outcomes.

It came out of our initial 2015 tour across Kansas and validated in our 2021 tour that Kansas said we want young people involved in their communities and giving back. And so we're going to be talking a lot about civic engagement and this month's topic.

But we have a ton of things we want to bring you up to date about that we're excited about and we know that you're going to be excited about because it just major things happening in schools and just some remarkable events going on.

And let's start with American Education Week. What a great opportunity to just recognize all of the wonderful things going on in each of our Kansas schools during the American Education Week. But let's talk specifically about two groups of people that we often don't talk about very much.

And I just want to highlight during this week, the first is going to be support professionals, those people that support the classroom, support in a nutrition standpoint, support by cleaning, maintaining a building, getting our kids to school there.

They do a lot of functions, but they're not necessarily the teachers in school. So thank you to all of our support professionals. Too often we leave them out of the of the accolades, we leave them out of the conversation.

And so if nothing else, as you see in this podcast, I want you to as you start by school, maybe pick up your child or you're running in the school, you're going to go to an event, say thank you to the ticket taker, go up to the custodian that's clean up after a ballgame.

Say, really appreciate the work that you're doing. Maybe when you go to see your child at lunch to catch them because, you know, it's a great time. Go up to the food service people and again say thank you.

So those support professionals are so important. We could not do this work without them, and we honor their work during American Education Week and the other group. I want to give a special shout out during this remarkable American Education Week are substitute teachers.

We have issued the licenses of thousands of more substitutes and emergency substitutes. And so first, I want to thank a ton of parents that came out and said, You know what? I'll get an emergency substitute license. I may not be able to do it every day. I mean, not to be able to do it all day, but I'll come in and help you whatever way I can. So thank you to the thousands of substitute teachers that are in Kansas schools every day, which help when a teacher's ill or has to be out of the classroom for any reason.

The State Board of Education gave a very special award. It was the confidence in public education. 2021 ABC Award to Dr. Lee Norman. And we want to say thank you to Dr. Norman. He has been working with public health officials to craft and to give guidance to school districts since March of 2020.

And we could not have a safer environment without Dr. Norman and all of the special people at KDHE . So congratulations to Dr. Lee Norman, the recipient of the 2021 ABC Award from the Confidence and Public Education. And thank you to the State Board of Education for announcing that at their meeting in the month of November.

Speaking of the month of November, the state board some big recognition that we want to give. As you know, in our accreditation process. The State Board has said there are eight outcomes that we're trying to achieve across Kansas because we have looked at the research, we've looked at what Kansans said they wanted in their system and those eight areas when you look at it in its entirety, help lead students to be successful. And so I want to go over those with you today and then give some special shout outs. There's some school districts that are just doing remarkable work and are achieving at the highest levels within each of these categories of really trying to say, we're putting students and families first and we're focused on their students success.

One of the first things we look look at is high school graduation. What percent of kids that start as freshmen graduate from high school four years later?

Our goal is 95% that we the world and there are no other state or any other country that achieves a 95% graduation rate. This past month, we had the opportunity during November to honor a great many of Kansas school districts that achieved a 95% graduation rate last year.

And so we want you to go to your school district and say, what was our graduation rate? Because what's really important about that is the number of kids then that have the opportunity to go on to be successful.

Our graduation rate as a state is setting just over 88%. That is the highest in the history of our state. We're proud of all of the efforts of schools, but we have so that group of schools that are achieving above 95%.

And we want to give them a special shout out. Along with that, we measure students that go on after high school and earn something after high school, a certificate associate degree, a backward degree, a master's. Or should we start recognizing those districts that have over 50% of their student body, what we call post-secondary, effective rates and the

state board again honored at the top level? Those districts that are accomplishing that goal at over 70% of their students. What's really interesting about that is you have small schools and large schools, a variety of schools doing that.

We want to say congratulations there, too. third area of the eight is academically prepared for high school graduation and beyond post-secondary success. And at the top of that game, we want to give a special shout out to the great work going on in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas School District, as they were the top recipients in that third category. Some of the categories, as we talked about civic engagement, we just had a great program. Again, we're going to highlight in just a few minutes, but some, some great progress there. And first gold recipient in the civic engagement area was Southern Wine County, so congratulations to them for all the hard work they've been putting in that area. We also take a look at kindergarten readiness, preparing those students for the rigors of showing up at age five, academically for kindergarten and social emotional. We have variety of schools of painting high levels in that area, along with social emotional growth.

Those school districts that are involved in the interpersonal, interpersonal, cognitive development of young people again looking at those areas and excited about the work that's being done in so many school districts. And then the last area, the eighth it's the state board looks at this what we call the commissioner's award, which are those districts that are actually outperforming what the risk factors in the metrics would say that they should. And this year, the top school districts in the state of outperforming. Well, we would predict them to do and achieve is Plainville out in just north of Hayes and Pike Valley in north central Kansas?

Congratulations to them, as they achieved at extremely high level. I can't wait to go present to them the commissioner's award with highest distinction. Now all of those things that we're trying to measure those eight areas reasonably again, we take a look at that, Kansans said those are important to success.

In addition, research says those things are extremely important to the future success of young people. So that's why we're taking a look at those things. But in addition. To those high, those school districts, we talked about receiving high recognition, there are some school districts that received multiple high recognition at the top, and one school district was recognized

by being at the highest levels on that medal stand in all eight of those success measures through the Star Recognition Program. A special shout out to the staff, the patrons, the students and the entire community at southern Lyon County, just south of Emporia.

For those of you that don't know where is south Lyon County, south of Emporia, it's one of those things. If you know your Kansas geography and you think, Well, why it's Kansas is in Lyon County, no, it's not Lyons.

Kansas is in Rice County and Lyon County is the home of a three school districts North Lyon County School District of Emporia and southern Lyon County. So we're really happy and proud of the work that they have done.

We're going to give him a little issue of a challenge. They were recognized at the gold level and two of those eight measures they received copper, bronze or silver and the others. The issue we're going to issue the challenge that they become now the first school district that might achieve gold in every one of the star recognition

programs is offered by the state. So congratulations to South Lyon County for the hard work. That's a community effort. We're really, really proud of the work that you're doing there in the month of November. We had our annual conference and just want to give a quick shout out to all the people that attended and say thank you. We had to do a virtual this year because we planned this well in advance. Didn't know where we would be, but we're so looking for that. Next year we'll be back face to face and I've got to give a thank you to all those here at KSDE that put together the Great Ideas in Education Conference: Unfinished Learning for our annual conference. They just a superb job, and it's not easy to put on a virtual conference. Thank you for those of you that attended. And special thanks everyone in our agency for putting that on.

You can now watch all episodes of the Kansans Can School Redesign Project all episodes. All six are now available to show you can get a playlist on the cast, the live media YouTube channel, and from there, that's that's where you want to go.

You can get the playlist of all six of those highlighted redesigned school districts that key state put together for us. Want to give a special thanks? Heartfelt thanks to the College of Education at Kansas State for creating this series and telling the compelling stories of school redesign in six sample school districts just meant to be a sample. Leavenworth USD 453. Liberal USD 480. Ditan USD 482. Wellington USD 353. Beloit USD 273. And Coffeyville USD for four or five. They were highlighted by the College of Education at Kansas State, and you'll want to tune in and learn What do they do?

What do they do different? What were their successes? What were their struggles in case they did a remarkable job in these documentaries? And as I mentioned, their compelling stories of the hard work that's been going on all across Kansas.

That's that's a snapshot of just the month of November, and now we're going to turn to the main topic of the month, which is civic engagement, we're glad again that you tuned in to really think about and discuss in your school, discuss in your household this really important topic, and we're honored to have Nathan McAllister with his. Nathan is a recently joined us from the Topeka Seeman School District,

where he was a social studies teacher, now heading up part of our humanities development in the agency. And so, well, we're going to be asking him about his thoughts about civic engagement.

But as we do that, we don't want to look back a little bit. How did civic engagement get to be a state board outcome and really part of the definition of a successful high school graduate? And it's simple, but it was kind of surprising at the same time, so in 2015, Brad Neuenswander and I went around the state to ask Kansans over the skill sets, attributes and characteristics of a successful 24 year old living in our state. And they described those beautifully. And then we asked them, what should schools be doing to to make sure that?

We the kids had these skills. one of the things that was clear as kids and said, we believe that young people. Should be active and give back to their communities in a variety of ways and be civically engaged.

And when we came back and analyzed that data, Nathan, it was interesting because we were a little surprised by the intensity of that. Not that it didn't come up at all, but by how often it came up. And the state board said, Well, that's going to be important.

I don't know if that's a Kansas, a Great Plains Midwestern type of value that Kansans wanted, but certainly is now a major part of what we're doing, what we're recognizing and what we hope to aspire then in schools to do.

And so can you just talk about from a teacher perspective there? We're saying, get civically engaged, get involved. Get your kids involved. What does that look like operationally on the ground?

Nate McAlister:

Well, thank you, Dr. Watson. And I think on on the ground level or students in the classroom.

Civic engagement takes on a whole host of opportunities for them, and it's not simply to go out and perform community service. It's more than. Hosting a voter registration drive. It is, as you said, serving the community, so that could be working with students of special needs and hosting a special education and Special Olympics program.

It could be that students are creating and leading those civic projects within their community rather than being asked to serve. They are leading in that regard. So it could be that they are assisting with what is our community need.

Maybe they're taking surveys and taking stock of what the community needs are and then taking that to an actionable level and engaging with the community to say we're going to provide this need as students and then that in turn creates an investment for that student within that community. And I think that Kansas is ahead of the curve in that regard. We're seeing now on the national level a push for civic education and. That's now that's within the last year or two.

Kansas has been doing this for four years and I think that's the forward thinking that Kansas has always had. And so for us to have students going out and being invested in their community not only serves us, not only serves our community, but serves our state, because now those students see the value in what they're creating within their community, and then they are more apt to stay in their community and

help their community grow that community. And those projects then become part of that community, whether it's some sort of working with the elderly in their in their community or working with those, as I said, special needs students or creating something that working with their city councils or their school boards to move those actionable items for.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

So, so many things, and I think when we use the term civic engagement, Kansans all say yes, yes, Americans, yes, yes. And then when we get to the details, maybe people start to, well, that's not what I meant or this is not what I meant.

You know, one of the things you mentioned, maybe working in partnership with the elderly as an example is a project. Some of our great projects we have going on and Tabatha Rosproy, 2020 Kansas Teacher of the Year National Teacher of the Year, ran an intergenerational pre-K program where that was in a nursing home, where older patrons got to come in and read to kids and in essence, Adobe kids and become their grandparents, per se. And so it was a warning environment that also had a civic minded engagement model built right into it. Just as an example, you know, it's just one of many examples.

But Nathan, now you're role shifted and now you're here at the state agency trying to now help all school districts think about humanities and civics. So what are you hoping then, in your current position within, say, the social studies assessment or as reviewing social studies that you hope teachers across the state then will take on?

What would you like to see and encourage them to do around civic engagement? But I think even broader around history and government civically engaged.

Nate McAlister:

For teachers to see that we don't have to compartmentalize ourselves, we don't have to say, OK, we're going to stop and now we're going to talk about civics or and then stop again and say, now it's history and stop again and say, Oh, now we're going to talk about government. Those are those intermingle with each other very nicely. And so why not take our social studies assessment and create civic engagement projects within our community that are also serving to highlight the historical, the governmental civic skills that students need to become really invested citizens in their community and their state and their nation? And so you can create all of that through an assessment where you don't have to stop and start and stop and start. It's all there together and histories everywhere.

Government's everywhere. It's in everything that we do. It's part of our republic. It's part of our fiber. And so why not take those aspects and create the assessments around those pieces? And that's what I hope to do with teachers is help them understand that they don't have to stop and start that they can make this a seamless process within, you know?

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Excellent. You know, I still aspire to be a history teacher once again or a social studies teacher once again. Now, maybe not the psychology and sociology side. When I'm in a small school where I was teaching seven different social studies courses, but one of the courses that I helped write actually with a lot of some grade social studies teachers and McPherson was when we tried, we were trying to integrate three years of social studies world history, American history, American government and civics over three years and kind of a blended model. And one of the one of the things we came about the bill, rights and other freedoms, shall we described it? And really just teaching so much through, you know, the Bill of Rights and other freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, which obviously is a constitutional kind of study. But then applying that to how does that apply to everyday freedom of speech or, you know, or taking a topic that, you know, very volatile, you know, where does that feel? What's the freedom? What's the what's been the response? How does that play out? And then having kids really immersed in the real day to day, how does that affect them? And then how does that work in law? And how does you know how it was intertwined?

I think that's really what you're trying to do with the assessment, right? Is, say, merge these things together and get them involved civically, but also have them learning the details then of what make up the facts that they're going to need to know about.

Oh, I got to go vote and I have to register and there are political parties and talk to everyone about again, that balance really practicing being civically engaged and then factually knowing civically engaged.

Nate McAlister:

Well, and I think you hit the nail on the head.

It's that balance between the content and the skills. And then we want to make sure we we can't have students not knowing the content of history. And then not understanding how that applies to them on a real world level.

So it's that balance between content and skills, and that's where we need to be. And that's where you get that civic engagement, that's where you get the boots on the ground, so to speak of. I'm applying that content that I've learned in my classroom and now I'm taking that to the next level, and I'm going to use that out in the community through a assessment that my teacher and maybe the students themselves are part of creating. It's not necessarily a one size fits all, it's not necessarily a one way street of the teacher creating the assessment.

It could be a partnership between the two. If the student sees the need in the community or in their state or in their county or even within their school, and says, Why don't we do this? Why don't we apply this?

And that could be their classroom based assessment. It could be that they're applying that civics piece in the classroom and it's in the community at the same time. And one great example, and I just love this example, is a fourth grader here in the state of Kansas who has seen their student handbook as their student constitution.

I mean, it's a very apt analogy. And so what? That fourth grader this is a fourth grader, mind you has deemed necessary is he wants to take on recreating that constitution, that school constitution and make changes changes that he sees are necessary within the school.

And so his teacher has had called me and said, Is that OK for this student to lead this, this project as as their assessment? Why not? If you have a student that sees the need within the school or within the community and says, Hey, I've got some ideas for change, why not let them run with it?

He wants to take this to the school board. He wants to petition them. And these are all application levels, as you just said of the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah, it's it's it's what makes us great.

And you know, we all have our favorite authors, I think you know, of of history and the study. one of mine many is Jon Meacham. And you know, and I think he talks a lot about the struggle in America has always been from the very beginning.

We're all these people that came from other places to arrive here for a hope and a future that we didn't have wherever we came from. Unless we're a Native American that was already here on the soil. We're all immigrants at some point. And he says, and and we're flawed. We're flawed people, right? We don't ever get this quite right or in the pursuit of it. We're in the pursuit of this thing bigger than us. That's really glorious. And even when we make mistakes, we're always trying to push the envelope to how do we do this in a way that's really not been done because we're not a homogeneous country in this sense of many European countries or the history of that. I just think about that a lot. I think about this imperfect nation that's trying to be perfect and a young fourth grader saying, I don't like some of these things.

So I mean to oh, let me find out how I got to convince others of this and there's a process to go through, and some other people are going to disagree with why thoughts seem so obvious. And now that wasn't stays with that young person forever, as they believed that core knowledge with that application.

You know, we saw an example of just that. That was a great example, Nathan. We also saw an example of young people reaching out to our veteran, you know, as we honor Veterans Day in the state board on civic engagement and veterans with something called the honor flight and many communities are doing.

Can you just talk a little bit about what happened at the board meeting this, this this past month and that civically engagement within the honor flight and in the meaning of that both for veterans and students?

Nate McAlister:

I think it goes back to something you mentioned earlier with Tabatha that intergenerational experience and the investment you produce through something like an honor flight. It was an incredible experience to be in that room. Listening to veterans praised the students that they may have never had contact with until that honor flight and the connection that those two, when we're talking about the veteran and they're their chaperon, which is the student, the connections they made and the deep connections they made within that short span of time. That exchange, as you said earlier, will be with them forever. We witnessed at that board meeting were veterans standing up and praising these students, but then also talking about how it changed them at such a late stage in their lives that they're talking about this having an experience that is going to stay with them and the deep seated change that that occurred not only with those veterans, but with those students as well.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Right, civically engaged. We want to hear a little excerpt of some of the conversation that took place at the State Board of Education meeting. Let's roll that now.

Addy Scheve:

Hi, I'm Addy Scheve, Olpe High School Senior. Today, I'm talking to you about the connections that our students make with the veterans possibly the biggest takeaway from Honor Flight is the connection that you make with your veteran because it's not only a respect that you gain for them, it's a friendship, it's a partnership that you create. You make a connection with their families, with their friends or people that are important to them in them. I was fortunate enough to be able to take two veterans on November on a flight trip, and I cannot say enough how amazing it is to not only develop a relationship with them that is just so, so hard to explain. It's just something that you can't explain. It's you will never be able to replace what you've made with them because you see the memorials and the monuments. And that's great. The people are the best part.

Bill Brethour:

I'm Bill Brethour of Maple Hill. I was privileged and honored to be able to participate in this October's Honor flight, I'm a veteran, this honor flight is just an outstanding experience. The students that were with us were just second to none.

The reception we received at the airport when we arrived in Baltimore was very emotional to me. The entire trip? Our guardians were almost like our shadows when you turned one direction or the other. They were there. It was interesting to enjoy the camaraderie of the fellow veterans.

But to me, it was more important to see the student guardians witness through the eyes of us veterans the different memorials that we went to. It's an experience that I will cherish for the rest of my life. A wonderful experience and I can't speak highly enough for what they've done. Thank you.

Nate McAlister:

Both of them speaking about that change and about the importance of having something like an honor flight program within our state and the importance of understanding that most of the time it was talking about the relationships intergenerationally these young students and these veterans and the experiences that they were talking about and the experiences between both of them and what they learn from each other.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah. Shawn Horning in Wamego, Shawn, was part of the KTOY team with Tabatha, an outstanding educator. And, you know, he spoke to that in Wamego and you, as you mentioned it, were the veterans.

While they talked about being honored, walking through an airport and seeing the memorials and what it meant, what meant more to them is that these young people had taken an interest in wanting to know them and then getting to know them and this relationship that built.

And again, it's the application you can study that World War two was fought. Korea was fought. Here's the rationale. You can even go to D.C. on your own or with your family and see the Korea memorial. It's moving, especially at dusk.

It looks like soldiers coming out of the field. It's another thing to do that with a veteran and listen to his or her stories. And now you're putting that all together in a meaningful way that changes people's lives and what that means in their.

So when when you're out there talking and you know, whether it's the Honor flight program or the fourth grader talking about the handbook being the Constitution, how do you when you when you talk to people not in school and they say, you know, why don't we just teach in the three branches of government?

Why don't we just teach them the facts? You know, they just don't know the facts. Jay Leno, the man on the street you remember, you know, I don't know when what happened in 1776. I don't know. You know, and everyone gets upset about that.

Why not just teach a set of facts? Nathan, why can't we just stop there?

Nate McAlister:

The facts do matter. I mean, I think it's important for students to understand the year 1776. It's an instrumental part of American history, but it goes back to that idea of content, the balance between content and skills.

If all we want is for them to know and identify that there are three branches of government, and that's it, and that's where we stop, we are going to have engaged citizens, which is the one thing that we started off this conversation with at our adult population in the state of Kansas.

Once our students to be civically engaged, they want them to understand what it means to be a citizen, an invested citizen of the United States. You don't get that with understanding that there are only three branches you have to know.

You have to be part of the process. And to do that, you have to apply that knowledge. And that means going out. That means being a part of this honor flight. That means understanding that, yes, there was a World War two or Korea.

But hearing the stories from those veteran brings that to life, and it helps those students understand that a little bit better understanding how a bill becomes law. Yes, I can give the, you know, the steps, but that doesn't go into the whole meat of the process and how people are.

As you said, people are people. We're flawed and things are going to happen. Why the legislation happens. What is driving that legislation? And then as that fourth grader? Well, if this is how this happens, why can't I apply that to what I'm doing right now in school using a seeing my handbook as a constitution and maybe applying those same set of facts that I learned in class and then saying, I want to make a change, I want to make a difference. I think that's hugely important. Facts are facts. I get that. I understand that, but it's incredibly important for students to learn how to apply those pieces and work within this incredible republic that we've created.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah, absolutely. What we've learned through our redesign process is either or. It's I have a set of knowledge, I have to apply that almost immediately and after practice that I have to repeat that cycle. And the more I can practice the application, the more deeper the knowledge is ingrained it.

If I leave the knowledge without applying it, it quickly leaves. I've learned something for a test. Yeah, maybe I remember that five years from now, maybe I remember, but it doesn't really mean anything. But if I can take it apart, then I deepen that knowledge. I get an operational sense of what that means, and then I can. In this case, I can become more civically engaged. I can actually envision, you know, running for office or being a part of moving a bill that I feel passionately about or being on a city commission or being on a local school board, helping run a humane society, helping with a blood drive, whatever it is, whatever you feel passionate about, that, I've got to move other people right to do that. I just can't do these things by myself. And it's a collection of trying to convey my thoughts and my ideas and with other people than moving, moving my community in a certain direction.

Nathan, we're happy that you're here with us, you know, now serving in a different role. Social studies teacher extraordinaire becomes one of our humanities specialists. We're glad that you're here. We're glad that we're able in Kansas to talk about how important civically minded people are and that it's a state board outcome, but is one of the core pieces of definition of a successful high school graduate in Kansas. It's one of the eight outcomes the state board said. We must obtain civically minded, engaged young people. We have a civic engagement network where we honor schools operating at the highest of levels.

And then when those schools in every district operate at the highest levels, we give them recognition called gains and star recognition. So shout out to southern Lebanon County, where all their schools were recognized as being heavily civic engaged. But what we know is every school can be civically engaged. Every young person can be engaged in their school, in their community and just starts with an operational way of which to do it. Coming from a teacher or sponsor, or even a student, as you mentioned as a fourth grader.

So, Nathan, thanks for being on the podcast with us today. We want to thank everyone for joining us this month as we talked about all things civic engagement. We look forward to talking to you again next month when we highlight another one of the state board outcomes and really delve into depth about how to make that operational all across our state.