

“ THE PECK PERSPECTIVE ”

(From the Capitol)

February 9, 2022

Redistricting (an update) – After the Senate and House both passed SB 355, a map redrawing the congressional boundaries, named Ad Astra 2, the Governor refused to sign the legislation, and instead vetoed the bill. Since SB 355 is a Senate bill, the Senate was first to consider an override of the veto. We managed to garner the minimum number of votes (27) for a successful override. As I’ve previously indicated, I felt SB 355 was good for Senate District 15, so I voted for the veto override.

Next up, it was time for the House to weigh in on the question of: “*Shall the bill be passed notwithstanding the Governor’s veto?*”. The answer from the House, by a vote of 85–37, was a resounding yes.

Without doubt, there will be a legal challenge to SB 355, the Ad Astra 2 map. Sadly, that means, ultimately the Kansas Supreme Court will be the entity that draws the congressional redistricting map. I say that because, if for some unknown reason the Court rules the map as unconstitutional, we will be back to square one and repeat the process until a map passes the Court’s approval.

Government Transparency: Ever wish there was a place to learn more about how your tax dollars are spent, particularly on items like government salaries? Such a place exists – it’s KS OpenGov. I regularly spend time on their website. It has a large database with hundreds of reports at the state, city, and school district level.

Get there by clicking: <http://www.kansasopengov.org/kog/databank>

Education Spending & Remote Learning – Legislators field many questions regarding how much money is provided for K-12 education and what options are available to a district dealing with a pandemic or other natural disaster. Therefore, I thought it might be beneficial to provide some basic information.

Data published by the Kansas Department of Education reveals that, on average, Kansas schools budgeted \$16,686 per student (or \$333,720 for a classroom of 20) for the 2022 school year. The actual expenditure per student for the 2021 school year was \$15,869.

See the budget for any district at: <https://datacentral.ksde.org/budget.aspx>

Extra money from the federal government accounts for some of the increase for 2022, but state funding also increased by \$275 million; bringing the total funding to \$7.8 billion. In the Governor's budget, she proposes spending an additional \$200 million – money on top of the previously mentioned \$16,686 per student.

State law provides school boards and administrators with flexibility to manage pandemics, natural disasters, and teacher shortages. In 2021, the Legislature passed HB 2134, a bill to address remote learning hours and designed to keep students in the classroom environment for learning.

Schools are required to provide students with 1,116 hours of education per year – or 186 days. Of the 1,116 hours, a school may provide remote (internet) learning for no more than 40 hours per year (about 6 days) for any reason. However, schools may exceed the 40-hour remote learning limitation by making application for a waiver to the State Board of Education for a disaster. A waiver may only be requested for severe property damage. If granted a waiver, the lost hours are not required to be made up by schools. Note: closures related to pandemic do not qualify for waivers or extended application for remote learning.

Schools are allowed to close for any period of time, for any reason (including teacher shortage); however, those lost hours must be made up with in-person learning during the school year in which they were missed.

Individual students may remote learn for a period of time that is longer than 40 hours if the student cannot reasonably attend school in person due to an illness, medical condition, injury or any extraordinary circumstances (including quarantine). The extended remote learning timeframe is applied on an individual student basis and must be approved by the local school board (and their name is sent to the State School Board).

Finally, schools are free to choose remote education at any time, for any reason, but the state aid for remote or virtual learning students is set at \$5,000 per student.

Until next time, may the blessings of God be yours.

Virgil Peck
State Senator