

By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

Sally Cauble believes the Kansas Legislature needs to start planning for the state's education system starting with 2011 and 2012.

This is when the federal government will no longer fund the national system with stimulus money, and Cauble, the Kansas District 5 Board of Education member, said many questions need to be answered in order to solve a growing problem in the state.

One of those problems is salaries for teachers. Kansas ranks 38th in the nation in that category, and Cauble said the state has received a grant from the National Governors Association to explore and study alternative pay for teachers.

"We are studying different ways of alternative pay from different states and different studies," she said. "We have to come up with a plan, and we hope to have our plans or our suggestions of what alternative pay should look like so that it can be piloted in 2011.

Then we would ask a school district to pilot this program."

Cauble said under current laws, teachers' salaries can only go up if the state legislature decides to put money into education.

"This is alternative pay on how the teachers get paid," she said. "It isn't alternative funding."

In the state's most recent budget, education was cut significantly, and Cauble said some schools in her district cannot afford much more in the way of reductions.

"If they do one more budget, I have a school system in District 5 where the teachers will be doing the janitorial work," she said. "I received that information from a superintendent."

As with its counterparts in higher education, public school officials were warned about the cuts, but while lawmakers tried to adjust last year's budget accordingly, Cauble said there is only so much funding which can be carried over from year to year.

"The state was also late with payments," she said. "We just want to make sure that when they cut we can meet the budget at the schools.

They cut after a budget has already been turned in and people have already been hired."

Also included in the cuts, Cauble said the state's BOE members want to make sure people don't have to be laid off in schools.

"All the schools have plans on the cuts on how it's going to affect the school and what they're going to do without next," she said. "The schools that are larger, the percentage isn't as great to them, but it's the 1A through 4A schools that has really affected layoff, has really affected its end to program for kids. A lot of those school districts, the superintendents are already principals, and the principals are already teaching."

Cauble said these schools have already been affected greatly by the cuts.

"I have one superintendent who drives a bus on one of the bus routes," she said. "It's a lot different than what people in Liberal see on a day to day basis."

The federal No Child Left Behind Act is up for re-authorization in the next Congressional session. Cauble said what many people don't know is that law is actually based on a law passed many years prior to NCLB.

"It's really the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," she said.

"That's what they talk about being re-authorized. ESEA is No Child Left Behind. I do know that we've had that act for many, many years."

In fact, ESEA was passed in 1965, according to Cauble, but it received little attention until the development of NCLB during the George W. Bush administration.

"It's time to re-authorize it, but in the meeting that I was in in June, they told us it would be after health care was taken care of,"

Cauble said. "We know that it'll be re-authorized. We just don't know what it will be called. We know that they are changing parts of it."

Despite the problems facing education in Kansas, Cauble said she still sees the system growing.

"I look for it to go to a growth model," she said. "It will be data driven, research based. I think the legislature is in a very tight situation, but by the state constitution, they are to provide public education."

Cauble said her board is asking legislators to fund the law, which she said will be difficult to do particularly after federal stimulus money runs out.

“They need to be planning for 2011 and 2012,” she said of state lawmakers. “There will be no stimulus money after that. It was for two years, and the federal government will not be doing stimulus money for education again. That’s what we’ve been told over and over and over, and all the meetings I go to, that’s what I’m being told.”

Cauble said the state’s education issues are a great concern to her, and she believes there needs to be some tough questions asked in addition to those of teachers’ salaries.

“What are we doing for revenue in the state of Kansas,” she said.

“Should education be funded with more than just property tax? Half of the budget in the state of Kansas is a three-legged stool, and half of the budget is a one-legged. Maybe we need to be looking at that.”