

**Testimony to  
K-12 Education Committee**

**by  
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I would like to provide you with my thoughts about the proposed school finance plan, House Bill 2410. In overview, I believe that it is a good faith effort to remedy the need for a school finance formula in Kansas. However, I also believe that it will require many revisions to become the finance formula that our children deserve.

**State Foundational Aid**

One of the complaints we heard about the old formula was that it was too complicated. In studying this bill, I am having a very difficult time figuring out what the district enrollment is and what's more, I don't know that I can explain it to my Board of Education. In evaluating the FTE with this plan, it also appears to amplify declining enrollment as well as increasing enrollment using the multipliers in the formula.

Under this plan, more than 100 school districts across the state lose money. This places approximately one third of the districts in Kansas in additional financial hardship. Under the block grant and the cuts across the board that we received in years prior to the block grant, many districts have had to cut staff and other resources. Many have also reduced course offerings and services for their students. Now, they will be given no choice but to cut more. This concept flies in the face of the vision that we are seeking to accomplish in our great State.

**Career and Technical Education**

I admire the fact that this committee is determined to increase the BSAPP. This plan does that. However, it takes \$100 per student out of the BSAPP for Career and Technical Education. These programs are essential for students as they pursue success beyond high school. I believe that Career and Technical Education should be funded separately rather than using part of the BSAPP.

**Transportation Weighting**

Transportation weighting is reduced in this plan. Again, I am having difficulty understanding this concept when every study we have participated in during the last few years, points to the need to reduce the 2.5-Mile Rule. Most districts are now transporting many students under 2.5 miles at district expense because of lack of safe routes to school. In Pittsburg, we are transporting nearly 1,000 students inside of 2.5 miles because of the

lack of safe routes, inadequate city infrastructure and lack of reliable transportation for families.

### **Bilingual Education**

Bilingual education is also reduced under this formula. In Pittsburg, our numbers of non-English speaking students is rapidly increasing. As we have grown, we have added teachers in order to provide services for our non-English speaking students. Many of our bilingual students are coming to our country for asylum from their home countries located in Central America. As a result, many are newcomers to America and require additional time and resources as they learn English and at the same time learn the educational content for their age level.

### **Special Education**

Special education appears to be ignored with this plan. Under the current law, schools are to receive 92% of excess costs of education for special education students. However, we currently receive approximately 78% of excess costs. This has resulted in an increased cost to the Pittsburg district of \$1.2 million in order to cover the costs of educating our special education students. I believe that this should be addressed in a new formula plan.

### **All-Day Kindergarten and Early Learning**

I believe that the suggested plan for phasing funding for all day kindergarten is workable. Currently, Pittsburg funds all day kindergarten using At-Risk dollars. This plan would allow us to target more At-Risk dollars to students who need additional time and resources to attain learning goals.

I believe that a school finance plan should include the expansion of preschool education. Currently, less than half of our students entering kindergarten have preschool experiences. The programs that we have are full and have waiting lists. For every student to succeed, I believe that preschool expansion is a critical component of a school finance plan.

### **At-Risk**

I appreciate that funding for at-risk will continue using the free lunch eligibility. I am concerned about the high-density weightings. A sliding scale should be in place so that a district does not qualify one year and then receive nothing the next year because of a small decline in enrollment.

## **Local Foundation, Enhancement, and Activities Funding**

Creating two local options that are required takes away local control of the school boards to make decisions for their local districts. If they are mandated, why not raise the 20-mill levy and drop LOB at the local level? The Supreme Court ruling on equity brought into question the idea of districts voting to tax themselves above 30%. Some districts do not have the ability to pass such a measure. With this plan, those inequities will continue to exist.

## **Conclusion**

The big question that remains is, “Will this plan meet the requirements as set forth by the Supreme Court for equity and adequacy?” I think it is very questionable. On the surface, this plan looks like it adds funding. However, when you drill down below the surface, the BSAPP increases while reducing weighting factors, which diminishes the effects of the increase to the base.

The transition out of the block grant will be difficult. Districts that have experienced growth during that time stand to gain additional funding based on their increased enrollment. While declining districts, stand to be heavily impacted by the accumulated effects of three years of decline. It will be imperative for this committee to consider a plan that will limit the negative impact to those declining districts.

In conclusion, I do not believe that we have the time to start over again with another plan. I urge you to revisit the plan that was introduced by Representative Rooker and make the necessary modifications to gain needed support. That bill is not perfect just as the old formula was not. Any plan will require constant monitoring and adjustments will need to be made along the way. I hope we can continue to work together as we focus on the vision of **every** child graduating with the necessary academic, social, civic, and employability skills to be successful in their lives beyond high school.