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Mark Desetti, Testimony  
Senate Education Committee  
March 23, 2015  
SB 294

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share with you our thoughts on SB 294.

First, we applaud the efforts of Senator Abrams to re-examine the school finance system, especially in light of the repeal of the current system and temporary block grant proposal. We are gravely concerned about repealing the system with no thought about where to go next.

We appreciate the fact that SB 294 continues to support students with extraordinary needs through the poverty allotment. Research shows that one of the best predictors of potential student success is living in poverty. We support the current funding of at-risk programs using free lunch eligibility as a proxy. The use of census data as contained in SB 294 would likely give similar results and provides for stable funding for programs designed to help students.

We are also intrigued with the concept of factoring in Federal Adjusted Gross Income and Median Home Values with Assessed Valuation per Pupil in determining equalization for local effort. We would assume this would give a truer picture of district wealth.

One of the most interesting aspects of SB 294 is the Success Incentive. This measure takes us away from measuring success based on one assessment test given on one day. It has been carefully crafted to allow for multiple measures of success after high school. We appreciate the emphasis on examining outcomes.

As interesting as the Success Incentive is, we also believe that it is fraught with issues.

1. The collection of data is troublesome since some of this is currently not available.
2. It does not account for the student who decides for reasons of his/her own not to immediately enter the workforce or post-secondary education. How do we track the success of a student who took a year working at minimum wage to save some money for tuition? What about students who discover two years after graduation that they should have listened to their parents and enrolled at the community college or technical college?
3. There is also the issue of data collection of this kind in general. Many legislators are very concerned about the collecting and sharing of student data. We've seen this in a number of bills to control or restrict data collection and sharing.

These are just three issues that we could classify as challenges to the implementation of the Success Incentive.

Finally we would hope that, should SB 294 be enacted, other districts could voluntarily join the system.

Again, we applaud Senator Abrams for bringing these ideas forward. We believe this is something that should be reviewed and discussed in depth as the Legislature goes forward in crafting a new school finance formula.