

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB356

Time to Control Unapproved Spending for Non-Instructional School Bonds

by
Dr. Walt Chappell

For years, local district administrators, architects, contractors and sports booster clubs in Kansas have promoted the passage of school bond elections by advertising to a small group of their voters that the State will pay a high percentage of the construction costs. This process has abused the intent of the Bond and Interest State Aid Program and greatly inflated the millions of dollars paid out each year by the Legislature for expenses they never approved.

Since 2008, local bond elections have nearly doubled the State Aid for capital improvement from \$75.6 million to \$145 million in 2014-15. The total school bond payments in 2015 was \$492.4 million, which is an increase of \$127.4 million since 2008. (See Bond spreadsheet in [Dropbox](#).)

Take the \$370 million dollar bond election held in Wichita in 2008 as an example. Local architects, contractors and sports boosters paid 80% of the costs to pass the largest bond election in the state. Their \$5,000 and \$10,000 contributions bought them multimillion dollar contracts to design and build spaces for the same number of students. Millions were then spent to renovate existing schools which the district later closed after they built new schools to which students now have to be bussed.

The contractors and architects in Wichita who paid over \$187,000 to buy TV ads plus thousands of yard signs and buttons saying 25% State money got local and state taxpayers to put our tax dollars into their pockets. This is pure greed—not educational necessity. ([See Wichita Eagle article here](#).)

As a result, sports complexes and Olympic sized swimming pools were built at each of the 7 high schools at a cost of \$67 million. The State is paying 25% of each bond principle and interest payment for these complexes which have nothing to do with learning employable skills. Statewide, the old formula required the **legislature to fund from 92% to 0%** of each bond depending on the district's LOB/bond & interest valuation. ([Click HERE](#) to see percentage by school district.)

The fact is that selling school bonds to build administrative and sports complexes in the foreseeable future is a grave mistake. Since 2008, there has been a huge push by local districts to pass bond elections and force the legislature to help pay the costs. At the start of each legislative session, these unappropriated costs come as a big shock and must be paid before other expenses.

It is taking money out of the State General Fund which is needed to pay our teachers, teach our kids employable skills, keep the tuition from rising even further at our universities and colleges, keep our communities safe plus provide vital services to thousands of Kansans.

Passing SB356 into law will let the Legislature first verify that the proposed bonds will actually be spent for instructional purposes before a local district is allowed to hold an election which forces every taxpayer in the state to help pay their local construction costs. Passing this bill will also allow the legislature to stay within the previously adopted budget and appropriations rather than being blind-sided with payments for bonds they did not approve.

It is essential that decision makers at all levels tighten their belts and make sure that vital services and programs are funded first. The emphasis for capital outlay funds, which districts already have, needs to be on remodeling and equipping special classrooms to teach our kids employable skills—not swimming pools, tennis courts, artificial turf on football fields, weight rooms or paving parking lots.

Respectfully submitted,

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