

Testimony to Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Chairman, Senator Ty Masterson  
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Hearing: Tuesday, February 3, 2015, 10:30 AM Room 548-S

**OPPOSE ([SB 71](#)) - School Districts Supplemental Aid**

Chairman Masterson and Committee Members,

I am here today on behalf of the Kansas PTA to convey our concern for and opposition to changing the school district supplemental aid formula, as proposed in the Senate Rescission Bill 71.

This bill puts Kansas students at even greater risk for an inequitable and inadequate quality of education, moving state education funding in the opposite direction of the recent Supreme and District Court rulings and of the Kansas PTA Legislative Platform. This retroactive cut to school districts, more than half way into the school year, would be irresponsible and would punish Kansas children for a tax experiment gone awry. Taken in context of the larger policy picture, it is hard to conclude anything other than our public schools and the vast majority of Kansas school-aged youth who attend them, are under attack.

- First consider the finance digression. This \$39 million cut from fiscal year 2015 is in addition to a proposed \$127 million cut in the governor's budget, no apparent funding allotment for the \$550 million plus operational dollars required to provide all Kansas children a viable opportunity to achieve state education standards, on top of level funding our K-12 schools at this unconstitutionally low level for the next two years, without even a cost of living adjustment. Plus, the House Rescission bill proposes to delay capital outlay matching fund payments to school districts until June 2015.
- Second consider, shifting responsibilities. A common theme among the proposed education funding plans is to shift state responsibility on to local communities. The governor's latest suggestion that school districts — instead of the state — begin paying for increases in teacher pensions rather than classroom instruction, is yet another example of the state making Kansas children pay for a failing tax policy. Please recall that the 1992 change in the school finance formula was due to the unconstitutional reliance on local property taxes, which by definition is an inequitable system of funding public education.
- Third consider, the greater needs and stress. These state cuts are coming at a time when the needs of Kansas children are higher. Over 50% of students are living at a level of poverty — less than \$36,612 a year for a family of three — which qualifies them for the free/reduced lunch program. This rise in poverty, along with increases in the percentage of students with disabilities and English language learners, puts a demand on Kansas

educators' equivalent to over 200,000 additional students ([KASB, 2014](#)), while state education standards continue to rise and families are still trying to recover from the economic crash of 2009.

- Fourth, losing faith. Kansas PTA is losing faith in our state leadership. We see the State Attorney General calling for another review of the Gannon District and Supreme Court ruling and turning away from the state's constitutional obligation to make suitable provision for the education of Kansas youth. We hear the governor propose a new finance formula that rewards rich high-performing districts and punishes students in the poor low-performing schools.

Kansans are doing their part. School districts across the state have increased or maximized their local authority to make up the loss of state revenue, even with the new mail in ballot requirement. Parents are paying more in fees. Teachers have been doing more for less and less. Kansas students are expected to achieve more with less support and less opportunity. Kansas PTA members are an active part of the team with PTA members collectively volunteer over a million hours a year for the Kansas public schools.

- Parents and patrons are tutoring students in after school programs, mentoring youth in the lunch rooms and on the playgrounds,
- ... judging debate meets, citizenship essays and reflections projects, as well as,
- ... shelving library books, translating, helping to cloth and feed our school communities working poor, creating welcoming school communities and celebrating birthday,
- ... along with raising funds for classroom supplies, library books, educational field trips, sports teams, performing arts programs, and
- ... raising more money for classroom ads, school nurses, librarians, counselors, social workers, playground equipment, laptops, smart boards, and so much more.

And with all these parent and community volunteers, we cannot even begin to close the resource gap that our teachers and school leaders face on a daily basis.

We ask that the state legislature do their part and make for suitable provision, invest needed resources in our public schools, provide adequate and equitable opportunity for Kansas children who live in poverty, who have disabilities, who are English language learners. Equip our educators with the tools required to help ALL Kansas students achieve the state education standards.

We urge this committee and the Kansas legislature to work toward a revenue solution, to dedicate new revenue streams to fill the FY2015 budget shortfall, as well as address the looming \$1 plus billion shortfall, and return to a more balanced and progressive tax policy. Shrinking government and privatizing our children's education is not the solution. We thank you for your time and consideration.

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Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. The PTA does not endorse any candidate or political party. Rather, we advocate for policies and legislation that affect Kansas youth in alignment with our legislative platform and priorities.

Kansas PTA Platform,

Legislative Priority 1. Kansas PTA will support efforts to strengthen and improve the Kansas public school finance system, which includes legislation and policies that:

- a. uphold Kansas Constitutional obligations to make suitable provision for the finance of the Kansas public schools that is equitable for every child.
- b. restore recent state cuts to base state aid per pupil, back to levels comparable to those deemed suitable by the legislature - actual costs identified in research studies requested and authorized by the Kansas legislature (e.g., Legislative Post Audit 2006 Cost Study).
- c. pursue solutions to fully fund state and federal educational mandates, including the new uniform financial accounting and reporting act, without disproportionately shifting the burden to local communities.

Legislative Priority 2. Kansas PTA will support efforts to restore an equitable and balanced tax policy to maintain a reliable revenue stream for public education. A policy which draws upon a combination of income, property and sales taxes has been proven by history to be a secure and sustainable approach. Kansas PTA opposes provisions limiting the growth of government before public education is fully funded to the statutory levels.. National PTA believes home schools and other nonpublic schools should meet the same educational standards as public schools.