

**Testimony Before Senate Ways & Means Committee
SB 273 – CLASS Act
Presented by Mike O’Neal, Kansas Chamber CEO
Proponent**

March 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

On behalf of The Kansas Chamber, I appreciate the opportunity to appear in support of SB 273, enacting the Classroom Learning Assuring Student Success Act, (CLASS Act) and repealing the current K-12 school finance formula. The current formula, while well intentioned at the time of its passage over 20 years ago, has become so complicated and unwieldy that it has resulted in unintended consequences, some bordering on the absurd.

As hundreds of millions of dollars of funds appropriated for education are either diverted to non-instructional priorities or left unspent altogether, Kansas finds itself, ironically, facing yet another lawsuit claiming state funding is inadequate! Every perceived failure by the Legislature to meet school district budgeting demands, in the face of the irrefutable reality that student funding continues to increase, is met with the false claim that school funding is being reduced. The formula has lost touch with the core principal of K-12 education – to educate. With overall state funding reaching historic highs every year, (over \$13,000 per student currently, and well above neighboring states) individual student performance has lagged and the focus has been diverted away from funding each student’s needs and has, sadly, drifted toward institutional wants. Administrative spending as a percent of total K-12 spending persistently exceeds the U.S. average – 15% above!

As the most significant consumers of the ultimate educational product of the state, Kansas businesses and industries have a huge stake in the quest to provide our Kansas students with the classroom resources they need to become college and career ready. The Kansas Chamber, as a part of its overall Legislative Agenda for 2015, has an Education section. Our overarching education goal is to **“support an excellent education system which produces a well-trained Kansas workforce for tomorrow’s business needs.”**

More specifically, the **“Kansas Chamber supports increasing the quality of education for tomorrow’s workforce and the efficient use of tax dollars through policies that:**

- **Support a suitable school finance system for K-12 education that ensures taxpayer dollars are adequately and efficiently invested toward instruction in order to provide students and teachers with the resources needed to fulfill the mission of the Department of Education.**
- **Support vigorous and dynamic Kansas-based primary and secondary education standards that focus on college and career readiness and which ensure acquisition, retention and**



“...to continually strive to improve the economic climate for the benefit of every business and citizen and to safeguard our system of free, competitive enterprise”.

comprehension of an essential base of knowledge at every step of the educational process toward a career suited to each student's interest and ability.

- **Support efforts to attract and retain the best and brightest teachers for the benefit of our Kansas children through a system that rewards excellence in teaching and protects against retention and promotion of underperforming teachers.**

The Kansas Chamber Legislative Agenda is the product of input from a large base of Kansas businesses and industries, both large and small and from all across Kansas. The Agenda, including the Education section, was unanimously adopted last December by our nearly 50-member Board of Directors.

HB 2403 would, if adopted, meet a number of our stated objectives and would signal the dawn of a new chapter in the quest to return the focus of our locally-elected school boards to the educational needs of each Kansas student rather than the expressed wishes of an educational bureaucracy that utilizes a formula that virtually no one understands and which fails to serve students' individual educational needs.

In this seemingly endless cycle of litigation, be mindful of the Court's latest test to determine adequacy. All funds, federal state, (including KPERS) and local, count and funding, both in terms of structure and in terms of allocation, should be reasonably calculated to lead to the statutory outcomes (Rose Standards). The State cannot ensure outcomes - only funding. The Block grants and the freedom they provide to allow dollars to be more effectively targeted to the classroom, ensures the State has fulfilled its charge to make suitable provision for the finance of public education. Upon enactment, the burden will now shift to the schools to allocate those funds in a manner that is reasonably calculated to achieve the outcomes we expect.

Now is the time to take bold action, on behalf of our Kansas students, their parents, communities and dedicated teachers, and refocus our attention and our dollars on the core mission of educating all public school students, wherever they may live, whatever their circumstances are and whatever their individual potentials may be.

A man I admire in educational circles has said that schools have been asking the wrong question: "The question is not whether your son or daughter is intelligent, but rather how is your son or daughter intelligent." In that regard, another plank in The Kansas Chamber Education agenda is to: **"support efforts to offer parents a variety of educational choices regardless of their socio-economic status, and support efforts to create innovative school environments designed to maximize the educational experience of children who don't thrive in traditional educational settings."**