



Kansas PTA

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Testimony to Senate Ways and Means Committee

Chair, Senator Ty Masterson

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

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9:00 am Room 582-N

Kansas PTA stands Opposed to [SB 273](#) – Repealing School Finance Formula for Block Grant.

Chairman Masterson and Committee Members,

We thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on SB 273. As a parent volunteer run organization, our availability to be present in Topeka within such a short window of notice is challenged by our daily professional and family obligations. The capacity to provide two conferees, all day, back to back is an extraordinary burden we could not overcome today. We were able to secure verbal testimony in the House on Monday. Nonetheless, the Kansas PTA will begin by acknowledging the step toward restoring the Governor's \$28 million cut in base state aid per pupil.

Yet, too many features of the bill are in opposition to the PTA legislative platform. Further, the PTA does not support the underlying concept of the block grant, which perpetuates an erroneous assertion that the school funding formula is broken. The Kansas Supreme Court has ruled twice now that the current formula is constitutionally sound. Rather, the inadequacies in funding are the source of our schools inequities and dynamic of winners and losers. The perpetual funding problem cannot be resolved without addressing the root cause.

We urge the legislature and all Kansans to focus on the heart of our cyclical school finance debate: Do you believe EVERY Kansas youth should be afforded a quality public education? And to consider how frequently Kansas youth will be denied an equitable and adequate education if the state chooses not to invest in what the Governor describes as "the state's primary function."

Kansas PTA would like to draw attention to several features of this Block Grant proposal for which we have greatest concern.

- **No restoration of 2009 cuts.** The bill fails to restore cuts made to K12 education following the global recession, leaving base funding for Kansas students at least \$600 short per pupil if not three times that amount – as reported by this legislature's own bipartisan research study.
- **Cuts to equalization aid.** The restoration of base aid is essentially nullified by the cuts to state equalization aid.
- **New students unfunded.** No funding is systematically provided for increased enrollment. The costs of educating additional students must be absorbed and drawn away from existing students. Further, the process available to districts to request additional funding requires a grant proposal to

demonstration an arbitrary level of extraordinary need, which will be approved or denied by a **partisan** legislative body.

- **No sunset.** The bill contains NO apparent sunset on the block grant time out.
- **No accountability.** By allowing flexible use of capital outlay funds and other crossovers, the block grant essentially eliminates accountability while simultaneously incentivizes districts to rob long-term dedicated funds (text books, safety and facilities maintenance) to pay for short-term demands (unfunded enrollment increases).
- **Three year funding freeze, reduced purchasing power.** Freezing state educational funding at the current FY15 allotments, holds school harmful, at a rate that the Kansas Supreme Court has twice ruled unconstitutionally low, and with no cost of living increases. The lack of inflation adjustments in and of themselves constitutes a reduction in purchasing power – aka – a cut.
- **Overdue pension payments.** The states long overdue payments into the KPERS funds are a welcomed and necessary fulfillment of obligation. However, decades worth of KPERS back payments do nothing to help students sitting in our classrooms today and should not be touted as such.
- **Unresponsive.** The block grant eliminates the responsiveness to changing demographic characteristics of districts and their students’ needs built into the current school finance formula.
- **Rushed and reckless.** The Kansas PTA questions the wisdom of making such a radical change in the state statute responsible for allocating HALF of our State General Fund, under this artificially rushed time frame. Lawmakers, conferees were not even given 1 business day to read, review, analyze, and digest a nearly 100 page bill. This massive, game-changing bill was not even afforded 1 full business hour of review and response time. And, this block grant bill is being worked in both chambers at the same time, systematically eliminating conferees from participating in this critical debate.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge this committee to vote NO on SB 273. This school finance block grant proposal provides no substantive means for districts to maintain or enhance a quality K12 education for its patrons, while at the same time jeopardizes the precedence set by the Supreme Court ruling. The noted changes in equalization can be done within the framework of the existing school finance formula, as can the funding freeze.

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The mission and values of the PTA have remained the same since our inception over 100 years ago:

PTA Mission - to facilitate every child’s potential by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Through advocacy, as well as family and community education over the century, PTA has established programs and [called for legislation](#) that improves our children’s lives including: the creation of kindergarten classes, child labor laws, public health service, hot and healthy lunch programs, juvenile justice system, mandatory immunization, arts in education and school safety.

Kansas PTA is a nonpartisan association that promotes the welfare of children and youth. 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.