

MINUTES OF THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Senator Barbara Lawrence at 9:00 a.m. on January 31, 2000 in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Senator Bleeker - Excused

Committee staff present: Avis Swartzman, Revisor of Statutes
Carolyn Rampey, Legislative Research Department
Jackie Breymeyer, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Diane Gjerstad, Wichita Public Schools
Craig Grant, KNEA
Kevin Harry, USD 501

Others attending: See Attached List

Chairperson Lawrence called the meeting to order and gave a few minutes to Mark Desetti, KNEA. Mr. Desetti made a few comments on the 'Read Across America' program and encouraged legislators to go to the schools at any time to read to the students. KU coach Roy Williams is the honorary chairman, who will promote and encourage reading with the KU athletic department getting in on the fun. After several further comments, Mr. Desetti thanked the committee for its time.

The Chairperson stated the committee would proceed with continuation of the hearing on:

SB 295-Kansas education opportunities certificate pilot program

Diane Gjerstad, Wichita Public Schools, appeared in opposition to the bill and distributed her testimony (Attachment 1) Ms. Gjerstad had several graphs and charts that detailed the performance of private and public schools which she went through with the committee. She stated, in conclusion, that these demonstrated that public schools offer unparalleled choice and strong academic achievement.

Craig Grant, KNEA, presented his testimony in opposition to **SB 295**, stating that his organization has long opposed attempts to take public taxpayer dollars to support private schools in either the form of vouchers or tax credits. Such programs could weaken or destroy the public school system. (ATTACHMENT 2)

The Chairperson asked Mr. Grant whether he knew if the voucher system in Milwaukee or Cleveland had weakened or destroyed the public school system.

Mr. Craig replied that he did not know the answer to that question.

Kevin Harry, USD 501, stated that vouchers would use state money to help students attend private or religious schools. Public schools are getting a bad rap regarding academic achievement and accountability. Actually, public schools are improving in both academic achievement and accountability.

The Chairperson stated the bill will be held and adjourned the meeting.



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**Senate Education Committee
S.B. 295**

Senator Barbara Lawrence, chair

*Submitted by: Diane Gjerstad
Wichita Public Schools*

January 25, 2000

Madame Chair, members of the committee:

The Wichita Public Schools Board of Education has adopted the following language for the 2000 legislative package, "... and opposes state funded vouchers....". This language represents a long-standing position of the Wichita Public Schools Board of Education.

The Wichita Public Schools rises in opposition to S.B. 295.

The bill would permit parents of children qualifying for free lunch, who score in the 40th percentile or below on standardized assessment tests to receive a non-taxable grant equaling 80% of the base state aid per pupil to pay the tuition at participating non-public schools within the boundaries of the pilot public schools.

Although the bill defines eligible students as "grades one through five", as a practical matter it would only apply for grades four and five. Standardized tests are given to students in grades three through nine in Wichita Public Schools, administered in late September with results back in November. Third graders scoring in the 40th percentile or below this year would be fourth graders in the first year of the pilot.

This bill is limited to four school districts statewide. These are not the largest four school districts nor are they limited to the state's urban areas. Instead, they are four districts that have large percentages of students from poverty.

In reading the bill one could infer the sponsors are concerned that students living in poverty are receiving a less than adequate education in the four public school districts and do not have adequate educational choice in the public school districts.

I welcome the opportunity to clarify the educational advantage found in public schools.

Senate Education
1-31-2000
Attachment 1

Does this plan make private school options affordable for families with limited incomes? Assuming a base per pupil next year of \$3820, the grant to the family would be \$3056. One private school in Wichita charges about \$6800 per student for lower school or more than twice the amount of the grant. The remaining \$3800 is an insurmountable gap for families in poverty. This effectively makes S.B. 259 a voucher plan for parochial schools. Unless the private school is required to waive any additional cost beyond the voucher, this plan does not make private school choice achievable for poor families.

A School District of Choice

The Wichita Public Schools offers a dynamic range of educational choice unparalleled anywhere in Kansas, public or private. The district offers magnet schools, special programs, and vocational and technical programs throughout a student's educational career.

Magnet schools provide a variety of unique instructional choices by offering programs that are organized around particular themes such as the arts, the environment or international studies.

The bill is restricted to elementary, so I will restrict my outline of choice available in the Wichita Public Schools to the 20 elementary magnets.

	<u>Free & reduced %</u>
Black Traditional Magnet	53
Bostic Traditional Magnet	22
Cleveland Traditional Magnet	40
<i>Core Knowledge Magnets</i>	
Bryant Core Knowledge Magnet	53
Minneha Core Knowledge Magnet	58
Buckner Performing Arts Magnet	36
Earhart Environmental Magnet	40
<i>Open Magnets</i>	
Emerson Open Magnet	30
Lewis Open Magnet	39
<i>Foreign Language Magnets</i>	
Horace Mann Foreign Language Magnet (pre K, 3 – 5)	93
Irving Foreign Language Magnet (K – 2)	93
Park Foreign Language Magnet (K – 2)	93
Hyde International Studies and Communications Magnet	22
<i>Science and Technology Magnets</i>	
Kellogg Science and Technology Magnet	73
McLean Science and Technology Magnet	24
L'Ouverture Computer Technology Magnet	37
Mueller Elementary	52

High Standards for All Students

In previous testimony before this committee the Wichita Public Schools has outlined the district's community driven standards and the assessments to measure progress toward each standard for each student. The district has been very frank about the difficulties a large urban school district with a diverse student population faces when launching a program usually done at the state level.

What measures has the district taken? The district has re-tooled staff development. Training of teachers is focused on teaching methods proven successful with students living in poverty, non-English speaking, students with learning difficulties, along with new strategies to encourage high achieving students to reach higher.

The Board of Education is setting high standards when each Wichita benchmark test comes online. The Board reached high when setting the mark, even knowing that the number of students not reaching the proficiency level would increase.

To help all students gain a strong foothold in the fundamentals, reading, writing and math, each building has developed an action plan putting in place steps to make each student successful.

Summer school was completely overhauled. Now the focus is on helping each student learn what was missed during the school year. Each student not meeting Wichita benchmark standards was offered a summer school scholarship. Each student was pre-tested, an individual plan developed, and post-tested. All information was then forwarded to the new teacher in the fall.

The Proof is in the Testing

Are students from poverty learning in the Wichita Public Schools?

Student achievement is on the rise in the Wichita Public Schools. All student groups are making gains.

The district is focused on closing the achievement gap between children living in poverty and those who do not. The economic status of the family continues to be the best predictor of academic success. Our challenge is to eliminate the gap.

Attached is five-year trend data for the nationally normed reference test (MAT7) administered in USD 259. Math is a subject area for which public schools have taken a great deal of criticism. Let's look at how the largest district in Kansas performs.

- Grade 3: students from poverty gained 14 points
- Grade 4: students from poverty gained 16 points
- Grade 5: students from poverty gained 13 points

State Assessment Results

Looking at the state assessment results for the comparable private and public schools can make another comparison. For this purpose I have taken three diocese schools with high numbers of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The diocese scores are compared to the public schools in the neighborhood.

	<i>Free/reduced lunch</i>	<i>% Non white</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Math</i>	<i>Writing</i>
St. Joseph	21%	17%	58.9	61.5	3.45
Jefferson	82%	65%	65.2	60	3.05
Griffith	59%	60%	56.2	46.7	3.08
St. Patrick	21%	40%	55.3	49.4	2.54
Pleasant Valley	63%	57%	48.4	50.7	2.97
Cloud	90%	82%	49.8	46	3.25
Woodland	52%	36%	63.8	58.4	3.32

Holy Savior	47%	98%	44.3	42.7	2.99
Adams	79%	47%	53.9	53.8	3.26
Mueller	53%	30%	58.6	55	2.96

These scores candidly demonstrate that the private schools, even with smaller class sizes, did not out perform public schools.

Cloud Elementary enrollment is 836. Ninety-three percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches. Cloud draws students from a predominately Hispanic area, for 62% English is the second language. Mobility is a reality for some schools, at Cloud 120 new students have entered since August and 82 have withdrawn.

In conclusion

Madame Chair and members of the committee, we have demonstrated that the public schools offer unparalleled choice and strong academic achievement for the students targeted by S.B. 295.

I would like to offer this committee an alternative.

Two years ago in this committee room an educator from a private school in Topeka testified. When asked what is the most significant difference between your private school and public schools, she quickly answered "small class sizes".

I would propose that this committee create a measurable small class size pilot for four districts named in this bill. The pilot would create small class sizes in the primary grades in schools with extremely large numbers of students on free/reduced lunch. The participating district would measure the pilot classroom with comparable schools without the reduction. Both schools would have the same language issues, mobility, special education and 504 issues. This data would give the legislature a basis to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the small class size weighting from small school districts to school districts with challenging student populations.

The school finance formula is sensitive to the cost of small class sizes through low enrollment weighting. Any discussion of small schools quickly evolves into the economic well being of the community.

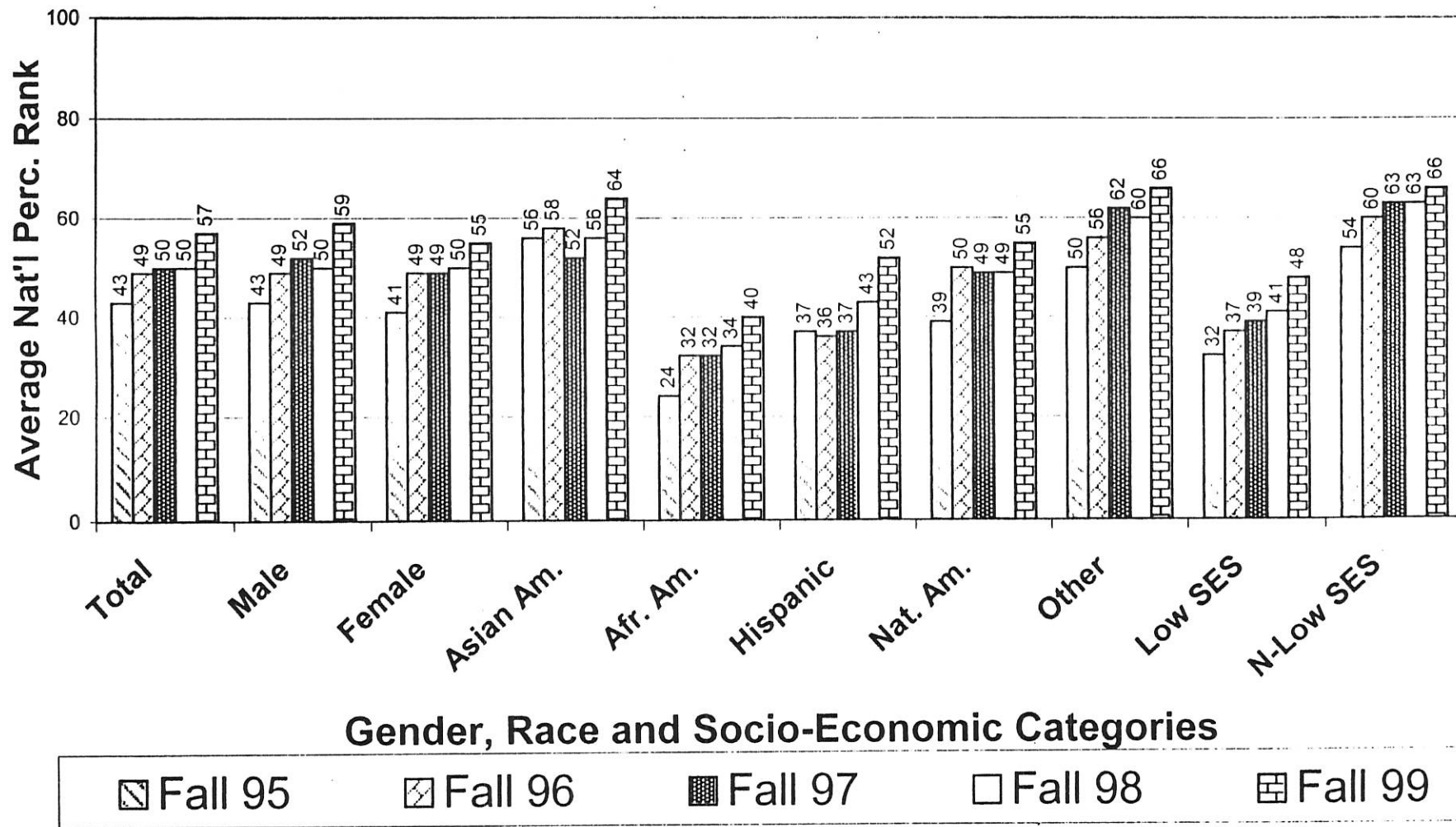
Is low enrollment weighting for educational reasons or economic? Urban communities are also facing an economic dilemma – a skilled workforce. The students we serve walk into our doors with greater issues than ever before, but the formula does not assist large districts to lower class sizes especially in the primary grades.

S.B. 295 does recognize that children from poverty often have intensive educational needs. That I agree.

A public school class size pilot would benefit the children who really need that extra boost.

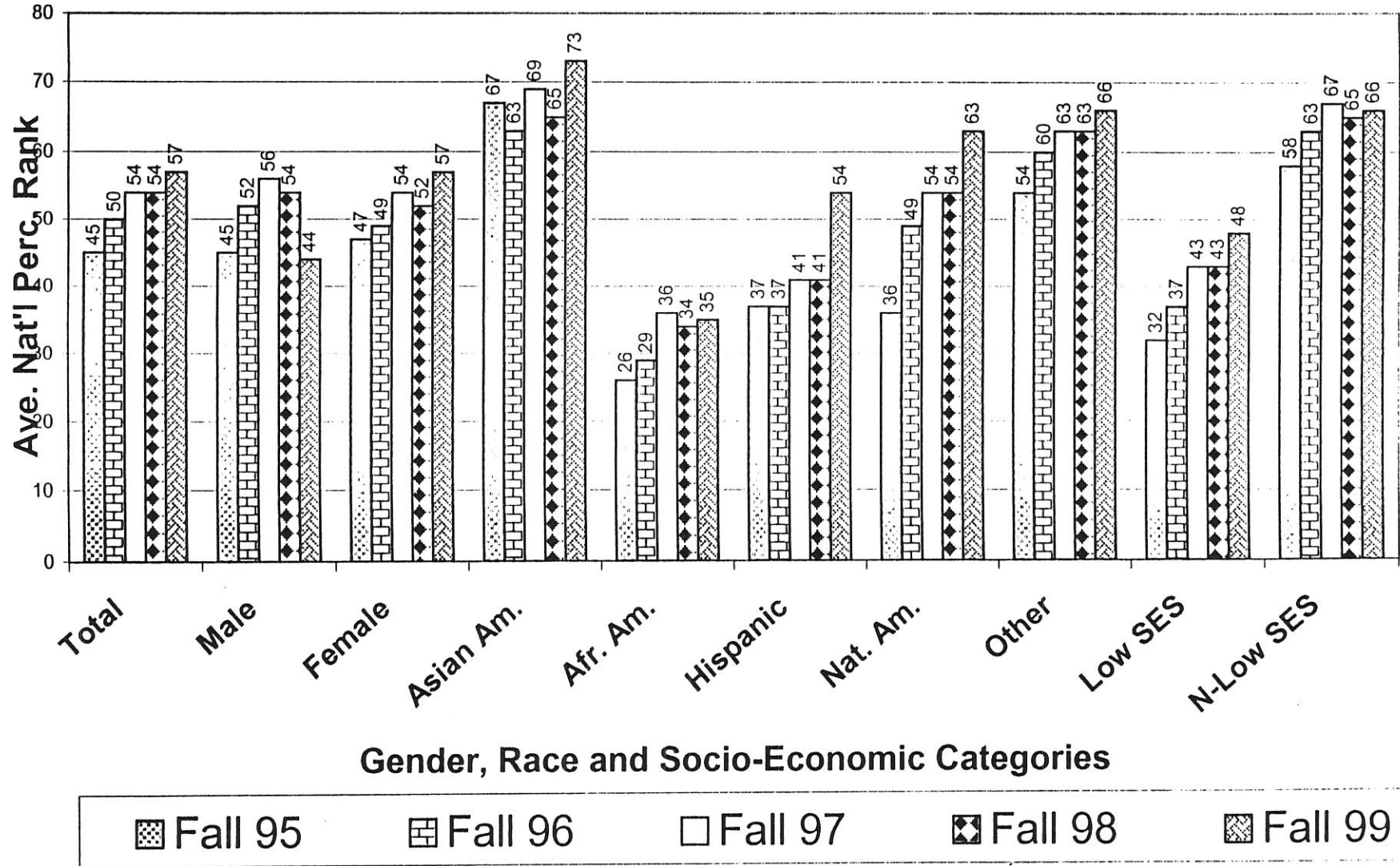
Thank you, Madame Chair, I will stand for questions.

USD 259: Trend of MAT7 Grade Three Math



Averages include Regular Education, Gifted and ESOL Level 3, 4 and 5 students.

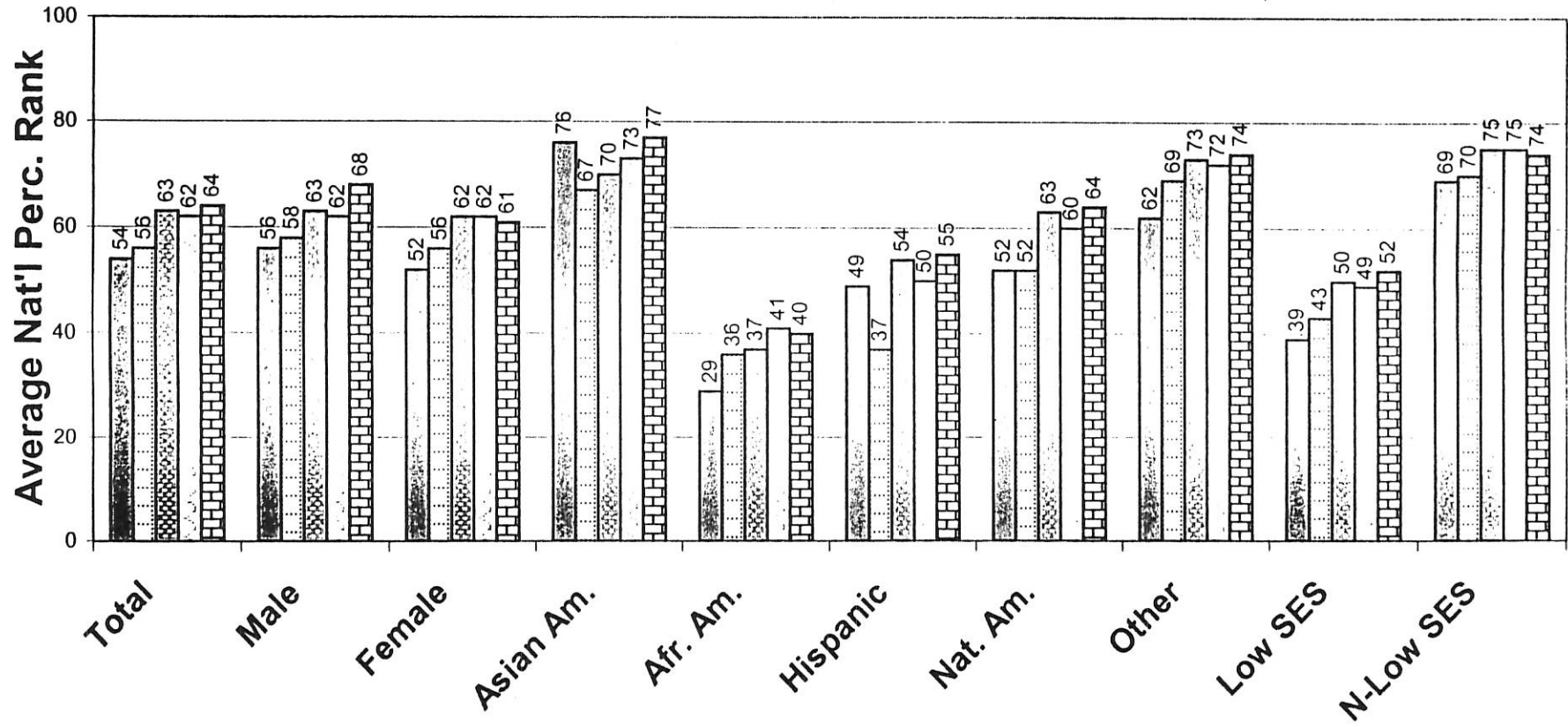
USD 259: Trend of MAT7 Grade Four Math



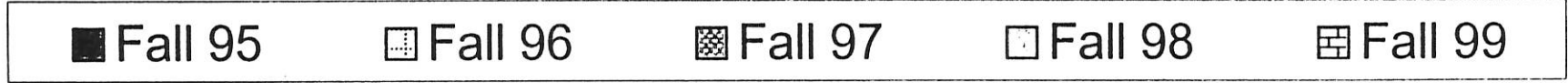
Gender, Race and Socio-Economic Categories

Averages include Regular Education, Gifted and ESOL Level 3, 4 and 5 students.

USD 259: Trend of MAT7 Grade Five Math

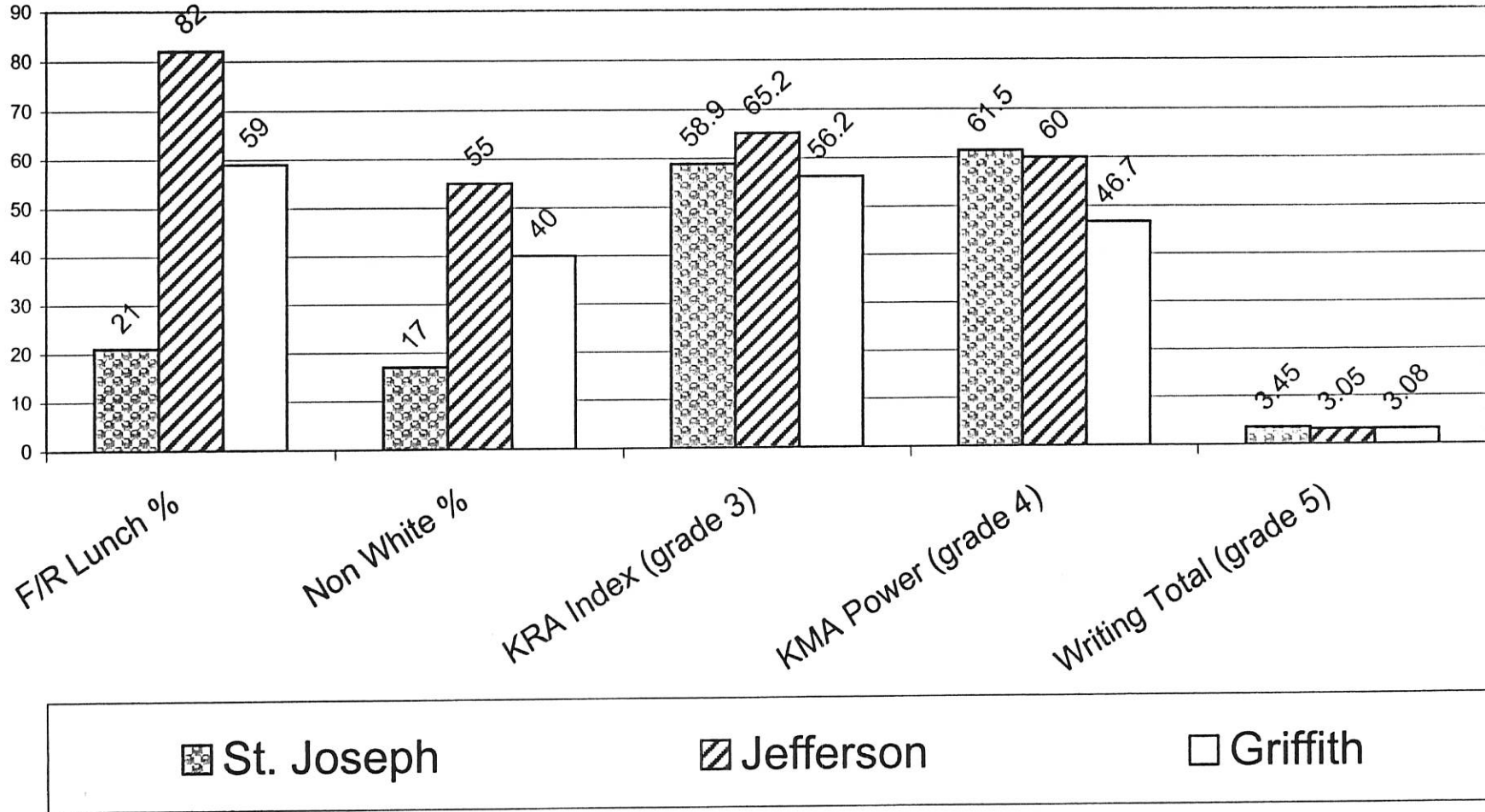


Gender, Race and Socio-Economic Categories

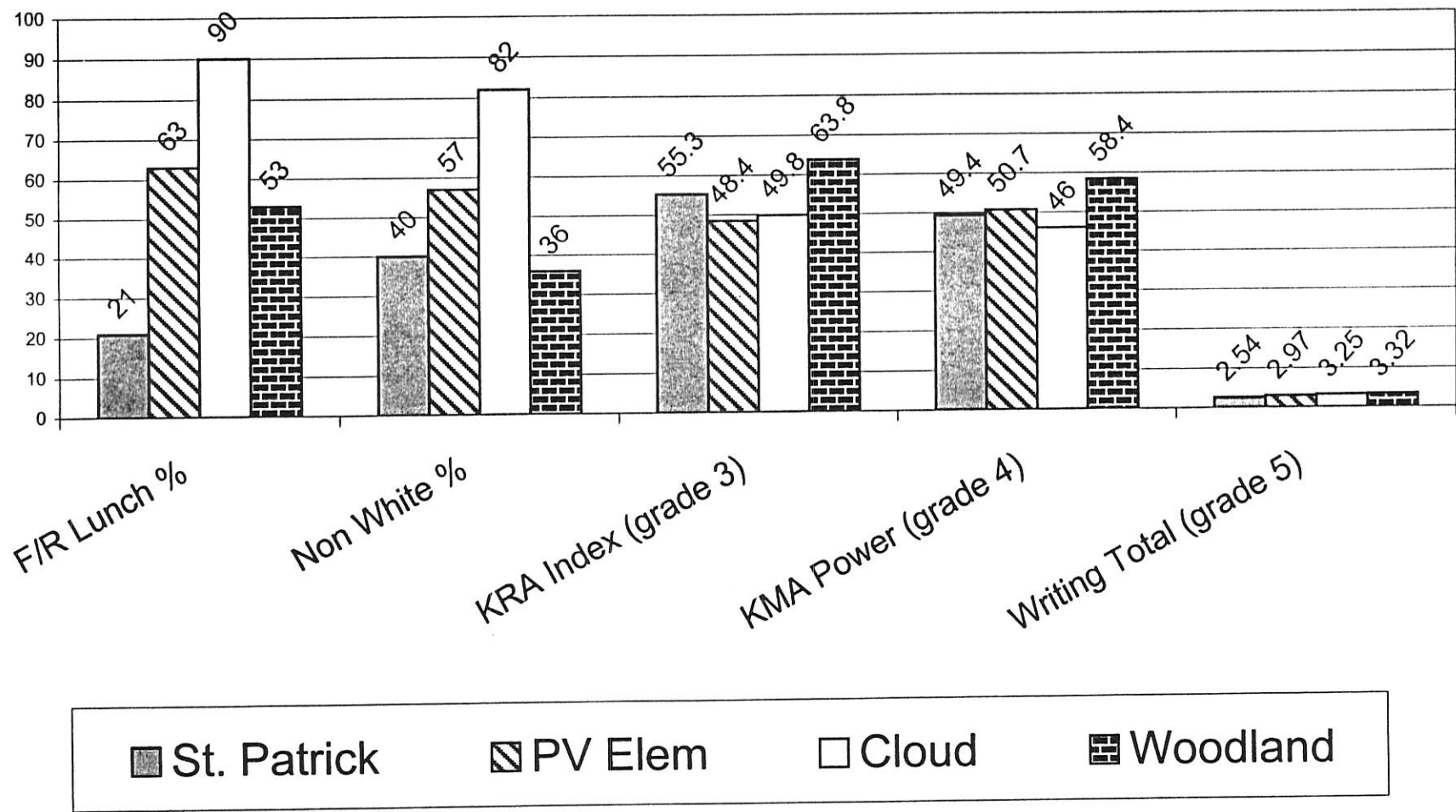


Averages include Regular Education, Gifted and ESOL Level 3, 4 and 5 students.

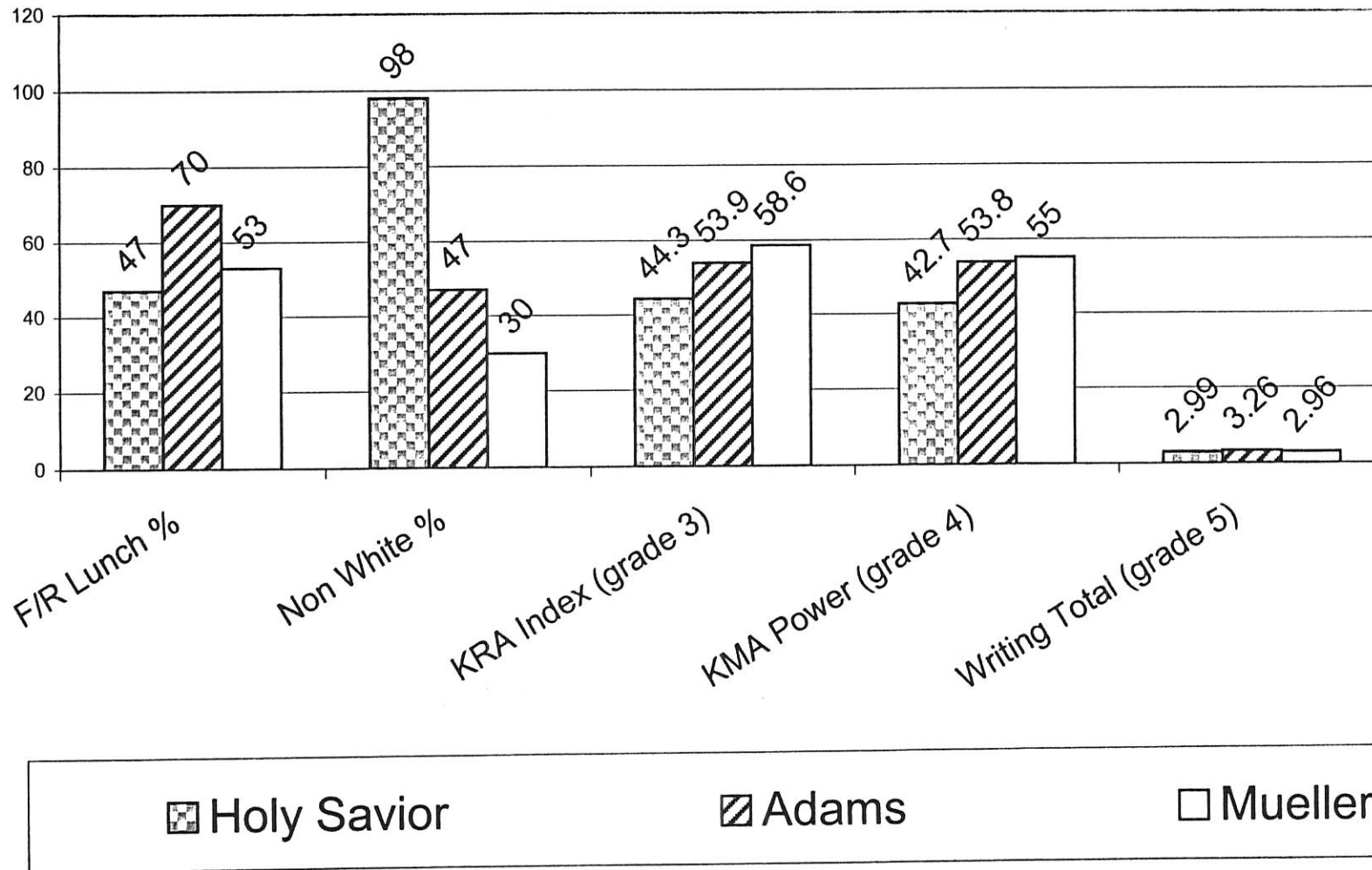
Pocket Comparison of St. Joseph, Jefferson and Griffith Elementary Schools



Pocket Comparison of St. Patrick, Pleasant Valley, Cloud and Woodland Elementary Schools



Pocket Comparison of Holy Savior, Adams and Mueller Elementary Schools





KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 W. 10TH STREET / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Craig Grant Testimony
Senate Education Committee
Tuesday, January 25, 2000

Thank you, Madam Chair. I am Craig Grant and I represent Kansas NEA. I appreciate this opportunity to visit with the committee about SB 295.

It comes as no surprise to you and others that KNEA opposes SB 295. We have long opposed attempts to take public taxpayer dollars to support private schools in either the form of vouchers or tax credits. Our resolution on the topic indicates that we believe that such plans “undermine support for public schools. Such programs could lead to racial, economic, and social isolation of children and weaken or destroy the public school system.”

Kansas NEA does acknowledge that “it is the right of parents to choose to send their children to private schools.” We do not believe that tax moneys should subsidize that choice.

Our resolution further states that “state funds should not be allocated to pay for feasibility studies of such choice, voucher, or tax credit programs.” That statement is the basis for our opposition to SB 295.

Some would call SB 295 a choice experiment; however, the real choice will be with the private school admissions office. Private schools could continue to have selection criteria that would take the students with the most potential and reject the rest, leaving the ones with the most learning problems for the public schools to work with in school. We certainly believe that this is a flaw in the bill.

We don’t believe that a study is necessary at this time. There are plenty of studies out there now with results of experimental voucher plans. Some we believe are more reliable than other studies. The university professor chosen to evaluate student achievement under the Milwaukee voucher plan, John Witte, has indicated in his annual evaluations that there has been no improvement in learning for the voucher students. Every other objective researcher who has looked at the Milwaukee results came to a similar conclusion. (Some have pointed to the Harvard study that found the opposite results. A series of respected researchers have examined this study and found it seriously biased in methodology and results.)

Public schools are America’s and Kansas’ commitment to provide a high quality education for every child. They are far from perfect and/or equitable, but at least the studies indicate that we are moving in that direction. Vouchers will drain moneys from our continued efforts to improve our system. We urge you to fund our schools adequately and defeat schemes, such as SB 295, which would take public school funds for private schools. Thank you for listening to our concerns.

Senate Education
1-31-2000
Attachment 2