



March 21, 2013

Testimony before the House Committee on Education
HB 2289 – An Act Concerning Common Core Standards

Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the House Education Committee:

Topeka Public Schools is in the first year of implementation of the Kansas Common Core State Standards, soon to be known as Kansas College and Career Standards. Last summer we worked with all K-12 Topeka teachers teaching Language Arts on implementing the Kansas Common Core State Standards. We also began the process of realigning our math curriculum to the Kansas Common Core State Math Standards. We have worked with all our teachers on how these standards will be integrated into other classes, including Career Technical Education Standards and electives. We want our students to have a rigorous curriculum with high expectations around reading, writing, speaking, listening and critical thinking.

The previous standards that Kansas developed many years ago, while good, have been described as “a mile deep and an inch thick”. The many indicators were designed to be taught before the Spring Kansas Assessment. Many critics said districts began teaching to the test. The Kansas Common Core Standards will focus on mastery of items and will also be more project-based in order to refocus teachers on instruction.

Kansas Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to best meet their needs. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and career. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. These standards will be clear so that every student, parent, and teacher knows what the standards of success are in every school in our nation.

Topeka Public Schools' teachers participated in state committees that helped develop the Common Core State Standards, initiated by governors and commissioners of education from across the United States. We in Topeka were heavily involved in developing these standards. Our teachers have worked hard developing lessons, finding resources, coordinating professional development and incorporating parents' input and feedback throughout the process. It would be detrimental to Topeka Public School students, staff, and parents to move backward now.

The Topeka Public Schools' Legislative Platform states: “The Kansas State Board of Education must continue to be elected to determine educational policy for the state's primary and secondary schools as established by Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.” We believe that this type of decision belongs to the Kansas State Board of Education and not the Legislature. Your focus should be on adequately funding Kansas Schools to prepare the next generation of citizens and employees.

Respectfully,

Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent

Topeka Public Schools Legislative Proposals

Topeka Public Schools Board of Education proposes the following technical amendments for Kansas public schools so they make decisions that will improve the students' educational experience.

Subpart 10.01

Kansas policymakers should adhere to the Kansas Constitutional requirement to suitably and equitably fund education with a state finance system. Such funding for education should be reliable, fair and financially sustainable, and not overly reliant on local funding or limited by political pressures. Allowance for spending on education should be directly tied to the educational needs of the state's student population in order to adequately prepare students for success in the workforce. The current funding formula is sound. The main problem is that it is not funded.

- Any formula revision must take into consideration the Legislature's own 2006 study showing:
1. a direct link between urban poverty and low student achievement and a correlation between spending and student achievement, and
 2. the additional challenge and financial burden of educating at risk students in urban settings.

Taxes:

- A sound tax system is one where sales tax, property tax, and income tax are balanced. Above all, cutting state taxes without providing offsetting revenues will, at best, shift the burden for funding schools to local taxpayers and thereby further disqualify Kansas' education system. At worst, it will erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

About Topeka Public Schools
 Enrollment: 14,800 students | District: 206
 Special Education: 1,100 | Title I: 1,100
 Student Ethnicity: 50% Hispanic, 20% African American, 10% Native American, 20% Other

Proposed Amendments: The School Finance Act

The school finance formula must be for at least two years or more to allow our school district to plan, prioritize and forecast our spending into the future. The formula must provide the appropriate funding for any mandates required of school districts. Any additional unfunded mandates will force school districts to choose between providing core classroom services or meeting such mandates. The formula must maintain weightings for special populations in order to suitably address the wide array of students Kansas educates.

- The formula must adequately fund the base per pupil because per pupil funding is the primary source of funding for the regular classroom.
- The formula must consider the cost of educating today's students from year to year, with consideration to inflation.
- The formula must balance local effort with the state obligation to suitably fund education under the Kansas constitution, and thereby balance increased local funding options with increased state equalization aid. It should also mediate reliance on local property taxes.
- The formula must link local effort with state equalization responsibilities and strike a balance between districts with low property valuations and those with high property values, as well as the excess costs required to educate special populations.
- Districts must be afforded flexibility in operational funds, including capital outlay, to allow each district to meet the unique needs of the community and its student population.
- Kindergarten must be full day and funded in the formula consistent with grades 1-12.

Other Issues of Concern

School safety is a top priority, therefore we recommend funding for the Kansas, Safe and Prepared School Program and for basic incident command training for all school administrators and teachers. State grants for school safety would help ensure our schools are prepared for any emergencies. Quality early childhood programs are vital to student success. The continuum of programs should be preserved and enhanced. Topeka Public Schools remains committed to a comprehensive P-12 educational system.

- Career pathways and technical education should continue to be promoted, with an emphasis on public private partnerships that provide a continuum of exposure to possible career opportunities for students.
- The Kansas State Board of Education must continue to be elected to determine educational policy for the state's primary and secondary schools as established in Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution.
- Tuition tax credits, voucher systems, charter schools, or choice plans to aid private elementary or secondary schools are not subject to the same legal requirements and accountability standards as public school systems. The issue is not educational "choice" but using public funds to support schools that can discriminate in admission, provide sectarian religious instruction and "compete" under different rules than public schools.
- Research does not support the practice of retention as a method of improving student achievement. We support funded mandatory summer school for primary students reading below grade level.

