

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB103

**Honorable Chairman Abrams and Senate Education Committee Members.**

Basing the At-Risk weighting in the Kansas school finance formula on whether a parent's low income qualifies their child for free or reduced school lunches has little to do with their child's ability to learn. This is an artificial measure which greatly inflates the budgets of school districts with large numbers of low income families but deprives school districts which have families with higher incomes of the funds needed to keep low achieving students from failing and dropping out before graduation.

Obviously, this weighting in the formula is broken and must be fixed. Once corrected, State General Fund tax dollars will be targeted to teach students who actually need extra instructional resources. Students across the state will then benefit based on criteria which are reflective of their learning needs instead of their parents' income.

Most school districts with large populations of low income students do not target these extra tax dollars to provide additional instructional resources to help these students learn. Instead, the funds are lumped in with other funds to pay salaries and other operating expenses.

Because of the way the school finance formula is currently structured, school districts are recruiting students at the time of enrollment to pad their budgets. For example, if a student has a Hispanic last name, their parents are offered applications to claim that they qualify for free or reduced lunches. This often includes free breakfasts and food for the weekend. Yet, there is no verification of whether the income figures provided by parents are accurate or not. And, the Federal government does not allow districts to audit more than 3% of these applications.

Some school districts advertise on local radio stations at the start of the school year for parents to come in and sign their children up for a "new" free lunch program. These ads claim that most parents will qualify and tell them where to come to get the benefits of this "new" government program.

Ironically, in large urban high schools, they only have enough room in the cafeteria for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the students. So, those who qualify for free lunches go without eating or buy snacks.

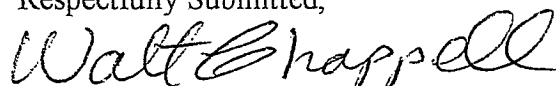
As a result, Kansas school districts reported to the KSDE that they **carried forward \$53 million dollars at the start of this fiscal year in unspent funds which were supposed to be targeted for At-Risk students.** This unencumbered balance is part of the **\$889 million** in operating accounts which districts held in reserve rather than spend to educate Kansas children.

The truth is that just because a child's parents may be unemployed or have limited income, this fact has little to do with that student's ability to learn. Children all over America and foreign countries live in poverty but can and do excel academically.

This bill allocates tax dollars to all districts to specifically help students who are at risk of failing and dropping out of school. It is reasonable, balanced and designed to help students learn before they fail.

Please pass this important and responsible correction in how tax dollars are spent to educate Kansas students.

Respectfully Submitted,



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