



Kansas Standing Committee on Education
Chairman Senator Steve Abrams
Testimony of Andrew Hysell, Associate Vice President, Policy and Advocacy
Save the Children, United States Programs

February 22, 2013

Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present today on behalf of Senate Bill 169, the Kansas Reads to Succeed Initiative. My name is Andrew Hysell and I am the Associate Vice President of Policy, Advocacy, and Development for Save the Children's United States Programs. I am joined by my colleague Amy Fecher who is our Arkansas State Director.

Save the Children operates 219 school-based programs in sixteen states and the District of Columbia. Our geographical region includes the southeast, southwest, Midwest, and Western states. Our focus is primarily rural with few exceptions. Within the rural communities where we work, Save the Children targets poor school districts that serve substantial numbers of struggling readers. A large majority of our partners include schools identified as in the poorest rural nine hundred school districts by Rural Schools and Community Trust. In these schools and communities, we provide programs to quickly improve children's reading skills and create sustained, school-wide reform.

In Kansas, we are fortunate to work with thirteen schools in Allen, Bourbon, Crawford, Labette, Montgomery, and Wyandotte Counties. In nine of these communities we provide a home visitation program that targets pregnant mothers and provides services for infants and toddlers. In six of the schools, we provide a school age literacy program that provides supplemental literacy support for children kindergarten through sixth grade. Nationally, children attending our school-age programs demonstrate an average improvement of five months over the course of the school year relative to their classmates.

We are here today in support of the Kansas Reads to Succeed initiative because we know how important grade level reading by 3rd grade is to success later in school. We applaud the governor and legislature for considering these investments so that struggling readers get the extra support they need to be successful in school and beyond. Kansas Reads to Succeed recognizes this and provides resources for effective programs.

Focusing on early literacy is smart policy. Children use language to communicate coherently; work through problems; organize ideas and structure arguments; extend thinking and knowledge to encompass other perspectives and experiences; understand their own thinking processes as well as those of others; and develop flexibility in representing and interpreting ideas.¹ For these reasons, children who read well are more likely to achieve in math and science, exhibit positive behaviors, and graduate from high school.²

However, increased funding alone is not enough to improve 3rd grade reading in Kansas. The Kansas Reads to Succeed initiative clearly recognizes that reality and contains key provision to leverage private investments, provide accountability for outcomes, and ensure rural communities are not forgotten.

¹ Reading is Fundamental, <http://www.rif.org/us/about/literacy-issues.htm>, Last Visited 7/26/2011.

² Hal W. Lanse, Read Well, Think Well: Build Your Child's Reading, Comprehension, and Critical Thinking Skills. Adams Media (2008).



First, it is good business for government to ask partners to contribute to a joint effort. Requiring a private match means Kansas tax payers will leverage extra benefits to add to their own investment in their children.

Second, the legislation's creation of a longitudinal study of student assessment data is commendable and necessary to verify that new programs are achieving results. While programs can demonstrate improvement over the course of a single year, tracking those students as they progress through grades measures whether change is sustained and ultimately able to impact test scores.

Finally, all too often, the nuances of rural communities are lost in legislation. Save the Children advocates at the state and federal level for the incorporation into policy the unique needs of rural communities. At times, this has meant criticizing federal education policy that is often geared towards larger, more urban school districts. Small, rural school districts have to contend with issues such as a lack of economies of scale, higher costs for transportation, a lack of skilled workers, and few public and private partners.

What is so inspiring about the Kansas Reads to Succeed initiative is that it explicitly targets rural schools for training and technical assistance. Improving the literacy instruction skills of existing teachers is very important in rural communities.

The Kansas Reads to Succeed initiative rightly targets resources for early interventions. We find that problems with struggling readers crop up early, especially in low-income communities. Low income students come to school already an average of eighteen months behind their affluent peers.³ Once they reach school, struggling readers spend only about two minutes each day reading independently, while top achievers spend more than forty.⁴ A lack of access to high-quality afterschool and summer programming, developmentally appropriate books in the home or other enrichment opportunities outside of school further exacerbate the achievement gap. During the summer months, for instance, the disparity between higher and low income students grows by about two months.⁵

When all of these factors are considered, the results are predictable: children fail to read on grade level by the third grade and, as a result, are four times more likely than their peers to drop out of high school.⁶ This is not just bad for children. It is bad for communities and for Kansas' long-term economic vitality.

Save the Children works in partnership with rural schools to address these challenges. We work with school administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and parents to increase knowledge, strengthen capacity, and increase access to resources that support emergent and developing readers. The philosophy underlying our approach to reading is "early and often." That's why we focus on ensuring

³http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2011KIDSCOUNTDataBook/2011KCDB_FINAL_essay.pdf

⁴ Allington, R., *What Really Matters to Struggling Readers*, 2nd edition, 2006.

⁵ Cooper, Borman & Fairchild, 2010

⁶ Donald J. Hernandez, *Double Jeopardy, How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011).



that children arrive at school ready to learn and increasing the quantity and quality of reading experiences once children enter school.

We accomplish that in a number of ways. For every school, Save the Children provides a combination of early, targeted interventions as well as attempts to improve the whole school environment. Beginning with pregnant mothers, we engage with children in their homes, working with parents to increase their children's exposure to language and text.

As the child nears school-age, we work to connect families with their local school and help promote a seamless transition. Once in school, we screen, identify, and then target struggling readers providing them a rigorous supplemental literacy reading intervention. Our "literacy block" includes an hour of guided, independent reading, fluency building, and read-aloud opportunities. Children's progress is tracked closely, in real-time, to assess progress and identify problems. To combat summer learning loss, we provide the same rigorous literacy intervention for six weeks for six hours a day.

Finally, at the school level, we work to improve the capacity of teachers and assistants to provide quality, effective literacy instruction. To support the overall culture of literacy, we upgrade school libraries and computer hardware and software. All of these expenditures are coupled with training and technical assistance to fully leverage these learning tools.

We are available to answer any questions. Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Hysell".

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