



Senate Education Committee
March 12, 2013
SB 224

Chairman Abrams and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee:

This committee has been busy this session studying complex issues and exploring various approaches to school finance reform. We at USD 501 commend your dedication to Kansas' public education system, which is arguably the most important function of government. Our School Board discussed SB 224 at the board meeting on Thursday night. Like SB 103, USD 501 opposes substantive changes to the current school finance formula, especially when the changes adversely impact our student populations that are the most difficult and most expensive to serve. We understand that the ultimate impact of this bill is to simplify the formula and dedicate funds from the weightings to the Base State Aid per Pupil. We feel strongly that BSAPP should be funded at the statutory level, however redistribution of our current funds on a per pupil basis results in a school financing system that ignores the fact that districts like ours incur increased costs due to higher concentrations of students needing specialized interventions.

SB 224 eliminates weightings that support students that require these specialized interventions. For example, funds from the bilingual weighting, though inadequate, ensure that ELL students receive specialized instruction so that they can learn and hopefully master the English language. The district has grown to 10% English Language Learners (ELL). Vocational education has been a priority of the Governor, our district and this Legislature. Elimination of that weighting moves us backward from prioritizing an area of student education that is crucial to many of our students' employability after graduation.

I've talked to you before about the importance of funding for at-risk. This year, 76.7% of Topeka Public School students are eligible for free and reduced meals. 19% of our students have been identified to receive Special Education (SPED) services. Students in other Shawnee County School districts look very different than our students. I have enclosed a sheet that compares the schools by enrollment, low SES, ELL, SPED and mobility. Internally, we have created a Student Needs Index which helps us allocate resources and support to our most at-risk schools in Topeka. When I appeared on SB 103, I provided an explanation and analysis of our district's use of "at risk" funds. We use 99.5% of our at-risk funds for direct instruction, employing strategies that work with our students.

A new funding model would cause Topeka Public Schools a net loss of \$7,173,183. This would result in major layoffs in Topeka Public Schools. Our district would have the third highest loss in the state behind Wichita Public Schools (-\$30,027,596.00) and Kansas City Kansas Public Schools (-\$16,522,439). However, districts with fewer challenges would actually see increased funding. (eg. Blue Valley [+13,856,937.00], Olathe School District [+11,796,419.00], and Shawnee Mission Public Schools [+8,020,645.00]) This bill does not link local effort with state equalization responsibilities and does not 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.

Senate Education Committee

TOPEKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS • 624 WEST 24TH STREET • TOPEKA, KANSAS Date 3-12-13

Attachment 11

Senate Education Committee
March 12, 2013
SB 224
Page Two

Just as no two children are the same, no two classrooms, schools or districts are the same. Children come to school with different backgrounds, opportunities, financial situations, language skills, and cognitive abilities. They show up to school, some more ready to learn than others, but they are our children. All parents are intrusting their most prized possession to us to provide them a quality education that will prepare them to be good citizens and future employees.

Our current method of funding is not perfect. In fact, it is woefully inadequate when it comes to the funds necessary to meet the individualized needs of each student from grade to grade. However you allocate funds, our district accepts the challenge to equip our children with the tools they need to succeed in the rapidly changing world. Our staff is dedicated to engaging students in the highest quality learning, preparing students for responsible, productive citizenship and to inspiring excellence for a lifetime.

Adequate funding is necessary to ensure that each individual student receives the educational experience that suits their individual needs. This is because their starting line is further back and there are countless obstacles in their path. For some students in our district, the price tag is higher due to greater societal or individual circumstances. No matter the funding formula, those societal outside influences and individual circumstances won't change.

As the Superintendent of a diverse and urban district representing educators working in the classroom with these students, I believe the state cannot avoid accounting for the challenges associated with financing public education equitably and adequately. Those challenges are very difficult to monetarily quantify because a student's needs cannot be precisely valued by a mathematical formula or numerical value. The current formula takes into account these anomalies while still addressing the reality that societal influences impact the classroom and have to be measured. By collapsing funds into the BSAPP, the funding system ignores the individualized learning needs of our students and the differences among districts statewide. The districts that lose funding if this bill is implemented are the districts that contain greater concentrations of students with special needs. SB 224 will detrimentally impact district's performance by directing funds away from districts with student populations that require extra supports beyond the basic per pupil allocation.

I thank you for your service to our students and their families.

Sincerely,



Dr. Julie Ford
Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools

Topoka Public Schools Legislative Positions

Topoka Public Schools Board of Education
 1000 S. 10th Street, Box 1000, Topoka, Kansas 67158
 Phone: 785-338-2200 Fax: 785-338-2201
 Website: www.topokaschools.org

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 'disqualize Kansas' education system. At worst, it will erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

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 it's student population.

Kindergarten must be full day and funded in the formula consistent with grades 1-12.

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. Topoka 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.

About Topoka Public Schools
 Enrollment: 13,832 students: Pres & Reducted: 77%
 Special Education: 19% ELL: 10%
Student Ethnicity:
 Caucasian - 42% Hispanic - 27%
 African-American - 20% Native American - 2%
 Other - 9%



