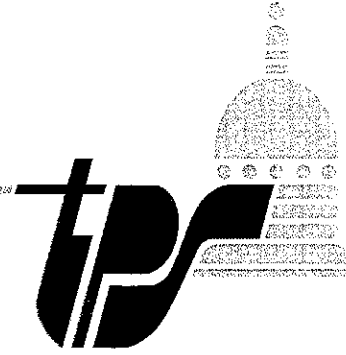




March 9, 2015

Chairman Ryckman, Jr. and members of the House Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on the school finance proposal released last week. This proposed bill is a cut to Topeka Public Schools.

My name is Gary Menke, and I am the new Chief Financial officer for the Topeka Public School. Having recently accepted the responsibility to manage our district's financial operations, I first ask for your empathy as I, like many of you, have been confronted with the complexities that are inherent in school district finances. I submit that our Board and Administration principal financial philosophy is to prepare students to join the labor force and become contributing members of the existing society, while also seeking to address and redress social problems and assist in finding and promoting solutions. Our school board and my colleagues that administer educational services for USD 501 have dedicated ourselves to prudent and efficient planning and distribution of resources in order to provide an equal and effective educational opportunity for each of our students. This is complemented by our public/private partnerships with businesses in our community and our role as a contractor for goods and services necessary to support the district's functions and school operations. But perhaps most importantly, family and community involvement and investment in the district drives funding decisions. The results is that the schools reflect the needs of our community and the workforce. The public and private sector rely on our district to prepare young Topekans with the educational foundation necessary to transition into higher education and the demands of a dynamic job market.

Foremost, I am responsible for utilization of resources to provide a rigorous curriculum, in a broad range of subject areas, delivered by well trained teachers, and supported by effective school and district leaders. The greatest challenge comes in finding sufficient funds for schools serving high numbers of low-income students, English-Language Learners, and students with other special needs. Concentrated student poverty in many of our schools generates greater needs that, in turn, require resources to support effective programs and strategies, such as high quality early education, full-day kindergarten, after-school and summer-school programs, and smaller classes in the early grades.

I chose this career path because I feel that financing public schools is fundamental to the national effort to ensure that all students have access to high quality educational opportunities that prepare them to assume the responsibilities of citizenship and to succeed in the economy. Sufficient school funding, fairly distributed to districts to address concentrated poverty, is an essential precondition for the delivery of a high-quality education.

At the core of school finance is the reality that equalized funding is necessary so that the poorest urban communities, successful suburban districts and rural localities can support rigorous, standards-based K-12 curriculum. Beyond that, districts like ours require dedicated funding for "supplemental" programs to address needs arising from concentrated student poverty; these programs included preschool, full-day kindergarten, intensive early literacy, and social and health services.

Based on the information released last week, under HB 2034, Topeka Public Schools would see a combined reduction of \$2,071,628 in General State Aid, LOB State Aid and Capital Outlay State Aid funding based upon the formulas in effect when our FY 14-15 budget was adopted by our school board last August. For TPS, the immediate impact for the current year is in the Local Option Budget State Aid (\$949,651 reduction of anticipated State Aid) and Capital Outlay State Aid (\$670,028 reduction of anticipated State Aid). For FY 2016, based on most recent reported numbers from KSDE, our district will have to accommodate an estimated \$451,949 fewer dollars in FY 2016 General State Aid than we will receive in FY 2015.

No matter how you allocate the funds in the current fiscal year and over the next two fiscal years, we are again faced with how to maintain current school operations with less funding. Cuts to crucial supplemental programming necessary to support student achievement have already been implemented. For several years now, we have been faced with making the choice between base classroom funding and supplemental instruction for those students that require additional support in the classroom. Unfortunately, the proposal before you today further deteriorates the quality of education afforded to students across the district. The unavoidable impact is that our ability to recruit qualified teachers has diminished and the ability of any teacher to meet the needs of our diverse student population has become excessively more demanding. Teachers are forced by accommodation to either neglect the special needs of those students that require individual interventions, whether high or low performing, or modify their classroom instruction to address the ability of a collective majority.

You have heard testimony that our education system is adequately funded. Yet this bill again decreases the state's obligation to address the demonstrated needs of students across the state and in Topeka Public Schools. You have heard testimony that our system is overfunded and that this bill suggests we can find a way to operate with even less state assistance. It has been our dedicated goal to work within the state's financial constraints. Yet we have turned a corner where new fiscal impacts are now driving education budgeting decisions. The economy has improved since the recession and we weathered those difficult times as a partner with state and federal government. As it stands today, whatever funding approach you choose does not address the bottom line, which is providing a system of education that is in accordance with modern times. Topeka Public Schools cannot support this bill because it simply rearranges the deck chairs and manifests the inherent problem with funding for our schools. Financing must be market-based upon the dynamics of the population and industry, the end product and the consumer. This bill requires that we do less and tailor our business model accordingly. So I close with an honest question: What kind of value do you want to create in Kansas public education and how does this bill accomplish that?

Sincerely,

Gary Menke
General Director of Fiscal Services and Board Treasurer
Topeka Public Schools

FUNDING YEAR 14-15 ADOPTED BUDGET AUTHORITY

USD	County	District Name	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8
501	Shawnee	Topeka Public Schools	Adjusted FTE Enrollment	Gen State Aid (excl) Special & Virtual	Est Virtual State Aid	Capital Outlay State Aid	LOB State Aid	Special Weightings	KPERS Est. State Aid	Total
			14466.3	\$ 75,759,177.00	\$ 966,852.00	\$ 2,274,382.00	\$ 19,250,326.00		\$ 11,766,832.00	

FUNDING YEAR 14-15 AUDITED BUDGET AUTHORITY

USD	County	District Name	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8
501	Shawnee	Topeka Public Schools	Adjusted FTE Enrollment	Gen State Aid (excl) Special & Virtual	Est Virtual State Aid	Capital Outlay State Aid	LOB State Aid	Special Weightings	KPERS Est. State Aid	Total
			13073.4	\$ 74,549,834.00	\$ 894,820.00	\$ 2,169,068.00	\$ 18,993,025.00		\$ 10,138,696.00	

FUNDING YEAR 14-15 BLOCK GRANT LEGISLATION

USD	County	District Name	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8
501	Shawnee	Topeka Public Schools	Adjusted FTE Enrollment	Gen State Aid (excl) Special & Virtual	Est Virtual State Aid	Capital Outlay State Aid	LOB State Aid	Special Weightings	KPERS Est. State Aid	Total
			13073.4	\$ 74,550,503.00	\$ 894,820.00	\$ 1,499,040.00	\$ 18,043,374.00		\$ 10,138,696.00	\$ 105,126,433.00

FUNDING YEAR 15-16 BLOCK GRANT LEGISLATION

USD	County	District Name	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8
501	Shawnee	Topeka Public Schools	Adjusted FTE Enrollment	Gen State Aid (excl) Special & Virtual	Est Virtual State Aid	Capital Outlay State Aid	LOB State Aid	Special Weightings	KPERS Est. State Aid	Total
			13073.4	\$ 74,858,646.00	\$ 134,059.00	\$ 1,499,040.00	\$ 18,043,374.00		\$ 12,708,797.00	\$ 107,243,916.00

FUNDING YEAR 16-17 BLOCK GRANT LEGISLATION

USD	County	District Name	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7	Col 8
501	Shawnee	Topeka Public Schools	Adjusted FTE Enrollment	Gen State Aid (excl) Special & Virtual	Est Virtual State Aid	Capital Outlay State Aid	LOB State Aid	Special Weightings	KPERS Est. State Aid	Total
			13073.4	\$ 75,504,634.00	\$ 131,010.00	\$ 1,499,040.00	\$ 18,043,374.00		\$ 14,062,319.00	\$ 109,240,377.00

14-15	14-15 Block	15-16 Block	16-17 Block
\$	\$	\$	\$
74,549,834.00	74,550,503.00	74,858,646.00	75,504,634.00
894,820.00	894,820.00	134,059.00	131,010.00
1,499,040.00	1,499,040.00	1,499,040.00	1,499,040.00
18,993,025.00	18,043,374.00	18,043,374.00	18,043,374.00
2,169,068.00	1,499,040.00	1,499,040.00	1,499,040.00
10,138,696.00	12,708,797.00	14,062,319.00	14,062,319.00
105,126,433.00	107,243,916.00	109,240,377.00	109,240,377.00

15-16 Loss State Aid from 14-15 Authorized \$ 451,949.00 \$ 949,651.00 \$ 670,028.00 \$ 2,071,628.00

Topeka Public Schools Legislative Positions 2015

Your school board is the advocate for your community when decisions are made about your children's education. The school board represents the public's voice in public education, providing citizen governance for what the public schools need and what the community wants. School boards have taxing authority and are your community's education watchdog, ensuring that taxpayers get the most for their tax dollars. The school district is one of the most important employers and business partners within our community. That direct oversight, responsibility and patronage is the purpose for local control.

Topeka Public Schools Board of Education promotes these tenets as guidance for Kansas policy-makers as they make decisions that will impact the students and families we serve.

Finance:

Kansas policy-makers 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.
- It is more efficient to return to the traditional practice whereby the statewide 20 mill levy is collected by local governments and distributed to school districts, rather than collected by local governments, sent to the State and then sent back to local school districts.

Taxes:

- A sound tax system is one where sales tax, property tax and income tax are balanced. Cutting state income taxes without providing offsetting revenues is shifting the burden for funding schools to local taxpayers and thereby further dis-equalizing Kansas' education system. This will continue to erode the quality of the education we provide for our students.

Key components for the school finance formula:

- 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 maintain weightings for special populations in order to suitably address the wide array of students Kansas educates.
- 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 consider the cost of educating today's students from year to year, with consideration to inflation.
- KPERS should not be calculated as a component of the base state aid per pupil.
- 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.
- The current funding formula for special education is the preferred formula for Kansas and should be fully funded at 92% of excess costs.
- Kindergarten must be fully funded.

Operations:

- 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.
- School districts must be allowed to carry over funds in their school accounts from fiscal year to fiscal year. From a financial management perspective, districts should be allowed to hold funds in reserve for emergencies and other long term expenses and unforeseen situations.
- Sweeping of funds balances would be financially devastating to school districts.
- Districts must be afforded flexibility with capital outlay funds, which must be equalized. We support the concept that districts should have multi-year capital outlay plans.
- State aid payments to school districts must be timely.
- The costs to school districts associated with implementing of a statewide accounting and fiscal management system should be studied and, if adopted, fully funded.
- Topeka Public Schools depends on the service of retired teachers as substitute teachers in our classrooms. We support current law, which allows licensed employees to return to work after a break in service to the school district where they were previously employed, without a penalty.



Other issues of interest:

- Gifted education is categorized as special education in Kansas, therefore students are entitled by state law to an individualized education program. The written plan describes specialized educational programs the student will receive, and it is regularly reviewed and revised by a team that includes teachers, counselors, the child's parents and others. These children have special needs and are entitled to be taught at the level they are capable of learning.
- We support adoption of an expanded definition of "instruction" and repeal of the law setting a 65% classroom expenditure goal, which is arbitrary and difficult to uniformly calculate.
- The safety and security of students and personnel is a top priority for Topeka Unified School District 501 and is a basic foundation for the well-being of our community. A strong network of school and community supports is necessary to cultivate a healthy and productive learning environment that is proactive and responsive to the needs of each individual student. While adequate funding through the formula is crucial to support student performance, a network of community partners dedicated to identifying and responding to the health and welfare needs of our community is also required. We urge the Legislature to restore funding cuts that have deteriorated the safety net of these programs and to provide opportunities to restore and enhance public/private partnerships that help bridge the gap between community and school.
- Quality early childhood programs are vital to student success. The continuum of programs should be preserved, enhanced and funded.
- 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.
- 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.
- We support additional school days and the funding of mandatory summer school for primary students reading below grade level.
- We support the identification of and provision of services to special education students utilizing IDEA guidelines.
- School board elections should continue to be non-partisan and held on the first Tuesday in April of odd numbered years.

About Topeka Public Schools

Enrollment: 14,095 students	Free & Reduced: 77%
Special Education: 20%	ELL: 10%
Student Ethnicity:	
White - 41%	Hispanic - 29%
African-American - 19%	Native American - 1%
Other - 10%	