



MainStream Coalition
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★ Rational Voices for Irrational Times ★

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Testimony to House Appropriations Committee

Chair, Representative Ron Ryckman Jr

March 9, 2015, 9:00 am Room 112-N

Kathy Holscher, Comm Assist, 785-291-3446

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Position – OPPOSE

Block Grant School Finance Proposal (HB 2403)

Chairman Ryckman and Committee Members,

Please accept MainStream Coalition's written testimony on HB 2403 in opposition to the proposed Block Grant bill.

MainStream has serious reservations about the proposed changes. Some concerns stem from the underlying premise of the bill and other from more specific elements of the proposal and process.

First and foremost, the block grant makes no provision for restoring cuts to the state education budget, for which research, the Kansas Supreme Court and the Kansas State Board of Education have indicated is short by about \$550 million. We urge the legislature to reconsider tax policy that has led to our current \$600 million budget gap and efforts to reduce state spending.

Secondly, MainStream Coalition is unaware of any empirical evidence to suggest that the current school finance formula is fatally flawed. Can the current equation used to distribute state education funds be improved? Yes. Does this mean the current formula is broken? No.

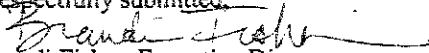
The Kansas Supreme Court has ruled twice now that the current formula is constitutionally sound and not the source of problem linked to inadequate funding required for all youth to achieve Kansas education standards. MainStream questions the feasibility and rationale of 'shopping for a new car, just because the gas tank is empty'. To continue down the path of chronic underfunding, will only serve to exaggerate inequities that are creating the ongoing dynamic of winners and losers.

Among the more specific issues, the legislative path this bill is following lacks transparency and lacks effort to garner stakeholder involvement. MainStream is troubled by the speed at which the legislature is considering the complete repeal of the school finance formula, which is used to distribute half of our State General Fund or roughly \$3 billion. The block grant strategy intended to replace the formula was developed in a vacuum, with no input from key stakeholder nor the experts from whom the state has elected and hired to oversee and guide the operations of Kansas K12 public education. Furthermore, this bill has no sunset on the questionable stop-gap distribution measure. The block grant essentially eliminates accountability and leaves districts with an unresponsiveness funding method that makes no allowances for inflation, new enrollment, nor the changing demographic characteristics of districts and their students' needs.

Why are we recklessly rushing to push through a school finance formula? The answer has nothing to do with the quality of K12 public education and everything to do with the state voluntarily running out of money.

We urge this committee to vote NO on HB 2403.

Respectfully submitted,


Brandi Fisher, Executive Director
MainStream Coalition and Education Foundation