

Date: March 10, 2015
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Attn: Senator Ty Masterson and Committee Members
Testimony in opposition of SB 273

USD 308 Hutchinson Public Schools - Hutchinson Middle School appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed K-12 education block grant funding. This legislation would have numerous effects on our students and the future of Kansas.

Under our current weighted funding structure, Hutchinson Middle School will not be hiring a librarian for next school year. Our current librarian is retiring and we simply do not have the funds to hire a replacement. In a world where literacy is vital for the success of our students, it is hard to imagine any K-12 school without such services. Block grant funding will not add funds for our school, in actuality, it will reduce our ability to hire and retain staff.

Although it is not clear from the figures supplied by KSDE, Hutchinson will lose \$313,000 under the block grant next year. As a result, we are looking at eliminating our Spanish elective, thus ending foreign languages for our students. We will also look at eliminating our In-School Suspension program, thus sending at-risk students home for Out-of-School Suspension. Out-of-School Suspension is detrimental to students academically, socially and behaviorally. Their parents cannot take off work to supervise them. If a single parent with a minimum wage job has a child suspended, they would lose their job by not going to work in order to supervise their child. Students who serve Out-of-School Suspension are highly at-risk and dropout at higher rates than their peers.

Other possible cuts include reducing the number of English Language Arts teachers at Hutchinson Middle School. Reducing ELA staff will not only increase class sizes, but also change how our students interact with the curriculum. It will reduce the ability to differentiate instruction at our current level, thus reducing the effectiveness and ability to accelerate learning for all levels of students, not just our at-risk learners.

In the last several years, Hutchinson Middle School has cut teachers in the areas of career and technical education, physical education, all core areas except English Language Arts, drama, administration and our school resource officer. Other budget cuts have affected our supply lines, travel, as well as cutting half of our activities budget. Some of our league schools have brought up the idea of cutting all "B-Team" athletics or cutting extracurricular activities altogether.

Athletics and activities are essential for all students, especially those at-risk. Hundreds of students at Hutchinson Middle School would lose the opportunity to participate after school with a trained coach in a positive environment. This will not only affect the students athletically, as we all know that students who participate in activities do much better in the classroom. For example, if we can get an at-risk student out for a sport, there is a great chance their grades and classroom performance will improve.

Hutchinson Middle School currently operates without a School Resource Officer (SRO). Our school matches our school district demographics of approximately seventy percent low SES (Socio-Economic Status). Our current student population is twenty percent behaviorally at-risk. Operating a school with over 730 students with increasingly at-risk behavior is challenging. Unfortunately, not having an SRO with an ever increasing need, is an example of the dire need for increasing funding for our schools. At-risk funds help our students have access to summer programs and better trained staff to help with increasingly at-risk behaviors.

Kansas is struggling to have a well trained workforce. As we all know, a workforce that is drug-free, literate, and college and career ready is desperately needed to keep and attract quality jobs throughout Kansas. A highly skilled and trained workforce does not begin at the postsecondary level, it begins before Kindergarten. At-risk funding that is separate and designated for specific purpose is vital to our students, communities, and State. Losing vocational weighting would be catastrophic to Kansas. Districts would be forced to choose between cutting academic core classroom teachers and cutting elective instructors that prepare students for the workforce. Students cannot wait to enter their junior year to begin their career pathway, these classes must begin at the middle school level or during the freshman year of high school.

For example, let's look at a current senior in high school who was able to take exploratory courses in middle school and as a freshman and sophomore. Hands-on classes in industrial technology that were taught by trained teachers and funded or affected by at-risk weighting and vocational weighting. This student was highly at-risk as a seventh grader, but was able to attend an after school program to get help with homework. He was able to be provided English Language Learner (ELL) services in middle and high school, another loss with block grant funding. This student is now participating in career tech classes under SB 155. He is highly successful not because of where he is at now, but because of the opportunities he had in middle school and as an underclassman. Students who lose the opportunity for at-risk programs, ELL, and vocational classes will not be prepared for postsecondary. More students will drop out. Postsecondary institutions need students who have graduated high school with a rigorous curriculum, not a GED. The loss of designated funds and overall cuts to K-12 funding will ensure that a current 7th grader will not have the same opportunities as today's senior.

Students do not enter college ready for success without at-risk and vocational funding. Receiving funds designated for purpose ensures that students will receive what they need, where they need it, when they need it. Weighted funding is not complicated, it is not archaic, it is what is right for kids. Having weighted funding ensures funds are spent where they are intended, and it adds accountability at the local level.

Lastly, I will share a story of a middle school student. This student has attended several elementary and middle schools in Kansas. He is diagnosed as bipolar, ADHD, ADD, and ODD. He has recently moved back in with a parent who had been homeless for several months and struggles with drug addiction. His other parent was abusive and had legal issues. He struggles with transitions and often reacts to the point of crisis. In his former middle school he left in a

police car on the last day of attendance. He dreams of working as an automotive technician as an adult. In order to achieve his dream he will need to be able to read at grade level. He will need classes each year that prepare him and help him stay motivated in school. Losing at-risk and vocational weighting will quickly evaporate this young man's dream of working as a technician.

School districts will need to choose between academic and elective teachers when making cuts. Elective classes including career and technical education will lose, eventually ending public school K-12 vocational programs and pathways. We have a strong career and technical education system in Kansas due to vocational weighting. Losing this separate funding will decimate our programs in a very short period of time.

In conclusion, as principal of Hutchinson Middle School in Hutchinson, Kansas, I am asking that you oppose block grant funding. Our students, schools, and communities deserve better. Let's work together to provide an education that enables students to truly become college and career ready.

Submitted by:  Date: March 10, 2015
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