

Testimony before the

House Committee on Appropriations

on

HB 2052

by

**G.A. Buie, Executive Director, United School Administrators of Kansas and the
Kansas School Superintendents Association**

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Chairman Waymaster:

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

First, please know as school and district leaders we understand the monumental decisions the legislature must make in the coming days and months regarding the state budget.

Unfortunately, school superintendents and school boards have been facing similar decisions over the past eight years. Deep budget cuts in 2009 led to staff reductions, academic programming changes, calendar adjustments, and facility cuts. In the absence of any significant budget increases, block grants, and frozen special education appropriations, districts are still having to make difficult budget decisions.

As the current legislature discusses potential cuts to K-12 education, we feel it is important to help committee members understand what districts will be forced to consider and the possible effects of those decisions.

With the majority of school district employees under contract, a large percentage of a districts 2016-2017 school budget has already been encumbered. Most districts have already made the largest percentage of district purchases for the fiscal year. Unfortunately, that leaves school district budgets with very little unencumbered funds and they would be forced to reduce expenses in these areas: utilities, summer programs, classified staff, transportation, and food service. Most often reducing these types of expenses can only occur by reducing the number of scheduled school days.

There may be school districts who can offset some budget cuts by accessing contingency funds or capital outlay funds, although this would definitely not be the case for all school districts. Ultimately, if these funds are needed to fill budget gaps today, it is going to affect future or planned facility repairs, equipment purchases, textbook or computer purchases, program start-up resources, and future staffing needs.

It is easy to look at budget cuts in the framework of a percentage, such as, "it's an eight percent cut" or "it's only a two percent cut," but the reality is, any cut to a district's budget is going to have lasting effects. The majority of school districts are investing all available resources into teacher salaries, additional staffing, rising health insurance costs, and enhancing educational programs within the district. Yes, you can find school districts which have been able to manage

the state budget cuts better than others, but that is simply not the story state-wide. During the last three years districts have struggled to hire the appropriate staff due to low salaries, they are challenged to meet changing students needs because of staff reduction, or they are simply unable to provide the opportunities every Kansas student deserves.

One of the measures Kansas uses to identify a school's success is with graduation rates. It's been my experience as a building principal that the majority of all students can graduate from high school with strong guidance and effective instructional support provided by qualified teaching staff. There is a smaller percentage of students who need specialized support to find their own unique level of success to reach the goal of graduation. Unfortunately, if a school is forced to close their doors earlier than previously scheduled or to cancel summer educational programs, students lose. These summer programs are designed specifically for students at-risk or students with unique learning needs and cuts during this legislative session will be putting these students at a greater risk of not graduating because these programs could not be offered.

For many of our students who need additional time and support to reach graduation, these potential cuts are going to be the most damaging. Cutting school days increases the likelihood a student would not receive the additional support they need to graduate and reducing summer school programs would decrease a student's ability to catch up if they fall behind. For other districts, not offering special education enrichment programs may not even be an option if certain programs are written into a student's IEP; it's now the districts responsibility to offer the programs.

Other programs the school districts could consider cutting are the end of the year and summer professional learning opportunities for teachers. With the State Board of Education's new vision, school districts are busy retooling curriculum, designing Individual Plans of Study, and improving student learning strategies. As the state transitions out of the one-size-fits-all model, teachers have been busy designing their own unique local assessments and measurements. Much of this work is completed during the early summer months and if school cuts are realized, districts could be forced to cancel these professional growth activities, which would only place the district farther behind other districts who have managed to move forward despite the budget cuts.

It's time to take a stand for our schools. I understand the state has serious budget problems, however, we cannot continue to allow our students to suffer from decisions they didn't have a hand in.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.