



Senate Education Committee

February 4th, 2020

Senate Bill 271

Testimony By

Blake A. Vargas, Superintendent

Caney Valley USD 436

Chair Baumgardner and esteemed members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of Caney Valley USD 436. It is my pleasure to be able to represent our Board of Education, staff and community. Most importantly, though, it is the highest honor to be able to speak for our students, especially those who will be directly impacted in the instance of failure to remove the sunset and allowing the high-density weighting to expire.

Communities such as ours will suffer greatly with any loss of funding. Districts like ours with such a high level of low-income students already face greater academic challenges and are less likely to meet standards for success. Despite the adversity, with the current funding we have been able to provide our students with an extremely quality education, and this past year we received the Commissioner's Award by exceeding predicted postsecondary effectiveness rates at our district. This would not be possible without access to high density weighting funds. As a district we actually invest more than our allotted at-risk dollars into ensuring their success. Without these funds, and given an overwhelming percentage of our budget is with personnel, this could equate to losing staff. Any loss that would be devastating for our community, our students, and the future of our community that I so dearly love.

In addition; myself, along with many across the great state of Kansas, have concerns in the event of loss of funding as it would certainly trigger the interest of the Kansas Supreme Court as it would reduce the settlement the Legislature passed in the *Gannon* lawsuit to address the adequacy portion. After many years of uncertainty, I for one would like to continue the good faith effort that has been made to remedy school funding and keep the court clear of this matter.

Next, Kansas state assessments have reflected that students have lower performance in districts that have higher percentages of low-income students. However, Caney has been able to excel in this area with targeted investments in all students, but especially those most at risk. High school completion, postsecondary participation and completion of postsecondary programs have all improved for young Kansas adults and is evident in our district specifically as we were awarded through the Kansas Can Star Recognition a Bronze award for our Graduation rate, as well as a Copper award in preparing our students for Postsecondary Success.

The positive side of this matter as I understand, is that the high-density at-risk money has been allotted and included in the budget. A simple deletion of the sunset would ensure that communities like Caney were able to continue providing valuable educational services to those who most need it. I urge the committee to remedy this sunset and ensure that as a state we are able to continue investing in those students who need it most.