



Senate Education Committee
Senator Molly Baumgardner, Chair

February 4, 2020
Susan Willis, Chief Financial Officer
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chair Baumgardner and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of SB 271. Wichita Public Schools educates almost 50,000 students annually. Over 37,000 of those students, *74% of our student population*, meet one or more criteria to be defined as at-risk. 90% of our comprehensive schools have 50% or more of their student populations identified with at-risk factors. This extreme level of need requires many layers of support and intervention, and Wichita uses the \$15 million High Density At Risk funding received to assist with the significant costs of these services. Loss of those funds at June 30, 2020 would be a crushing blow when so many of our students need additional supports.

Wichita receives At Risk and High Density At Risk funding based on a free lunch population of 32,403 students (audited, FY20). The District receives a total of \$84 million of combined At Risk and High Density At Risk funding and provides an additional \$12.8 million of additional support through other operational funds. These funds provide for a number of at-risk programs and opportunities, including afterschool programming, tutoring, homework support, summer school, extended school, credit recovery, learning centers in high schools, alternative instructional sites, intervention teachers, behavior specialists, AVID, JAG-K and drop-out prevention programs.

The critical use of At Risk and High Density At Risk funding is smaller class sizes for core instruction. We give our teachers the ability to manage smaller class sizes where they are able to implement small group instruction within their regular classroom. The Legislative Post Audit found smaller class sizes to have only limited success, but we disagree with that position. These students can present pressing instructional and/or some behavioral problems for teachers but are in most need of quality instruction to be successful learners and rise above their situation (Sagor & Cox, 2013). Keeping class sizes smaller helps teachers plan differentiated instruction more effectively, but perhaps even more importantly allow teachers to build stronger relationships with students, which is an important component of an overall at-risk strategy. Teaching academics and managing behavior will not be as effective without the background context of a strong relationship (Evidence Based Intervention Network, School of Psychology - University of Missouri).

Wichita uses At Risk and High Density At Risk in support of core classroom teachers based on the at-risk percentage within each school. Additional intervention teachers are fully funded with At Risk funding. With 3 out of every 4 students on average within the District considered to be at-risk, this approach is the most cost-effective while providing the most appropriate differentiated supports as determined by the teacher and school-based team who have the most direct knowledge of the needs of each student. Our teachers MUST use evidence-based strategies in their classroom every day when so many of their students are at-risk. At Hamilton Middle School, 93% of students are identified as at-risk. 22 students in a classroom of 24 students would be considered at-risk – we couldn't effectively manage pull-outs even

if we had the staff or could afford the staff to do so. Instead, teachers adapt their instruction strategies to meet the needs of the students in front of them daily.

And we are starting to see results. Our graduation rate has improved by 1.3% in the past two years, when we had been in a decline. We had 1188.5 credits recovered through at-risk programming during FY19. We had 293 credits earned during summer school, with 49 summer graduates. We have several schools showing 3-5% point improvements in ELA and math scores. While we're not where we want to be and perhaps not showing as much overall improvement as other districts, we believe that the foundational changes we're making and strategies supported by our local Board of Education will continue to bear fruit in the coming years. We are proud of our progress, proud of our teachers and staff and proud of our students. Great things are happening in Wichita Public Schools!

We share this information with you to highlight the importance of the High Density At Risk funding, which is *crucial* to continuing our work. To put the loss of \$15 million to our District in perspective, you only need to look at what Wichita is facing in FY21. With slightly declining enrollment, the 3% increase in the BASE aid amount will be negatively impacted by lower FTE enrollment and weightings. We estimate about \$10 million of new state aid, but already face a \$6.5 million transportation contract increase and about \$3.5 million of normal fixed cost increases. We are currently at net zero budget-wise without even considering a wage package. A \$15 million funding cut would require significant cuts to staff and programs just to get back to net zero. **In Wichita, \$15 million is the equivalent of 214 teachers.**

Wichita stands in strong support of SB 271, and we would urge the committee to advance this bill.