

CHANUTE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

STUDENTS FIRST

321 E. Main Street
Chanute, KS 66720
620-432-2500
www.usd413.org

Kellen J. Adams
Superintendent
E: adamsk@usd413.org
M: (785) 650-8282

February 17th, 2023

House Committee on Education
% Chair Adam Thomas

Dear Representative Thomas and House Education Committee Members:

My name is Kellen Adams, and I am currently Superintendent of Schools for USD 413-Chanute (Neosho County). Our district represents one of the 286 districts that are financed through the Kansas School Equity and Enhancement Act (KSEEA), as well as one of approximately 220 districts that receive some level of additional funding under the provisions of the high-density at-risk weighting.

The written testimony below is provided with respect to **House Bill 2223** as it relates to legislatively proposed changes to the high-density at-risk statutory language. I am writing this letter in full support of the proposed changes to the current language. It is my belief that the proposed changes, including the removal of the sunset provide numerous benefits that outweigh the potential costs. In full transparency, my current school district would be among one of many that would benefit from these changes as currently proposed, but without those revisions, would become immediately detrimental to the long-term vitality of our district.

Effects of Poverty - The specific intent of this additional weighting within the school funding formula of Kansas is to help combat the effects that living in poverty has upon the educational outcomes of a student. It is important to recognize that significant amounts of research have time and again provided clear results that a child's household family income will have a direct impact upon his/her potential trajectory within their educational pathway. While it is acknowledged that some students are able to overcome these barriers without additional supports, many require these in order to have a true chance of success in their environments. Put simply, high-density at-risk weighting acknowledges this concept and seeks to provide the additional financial supports for those districts with high levels of students living in poverty.

Generally speaking, students of poverty come from environments that provide less opportunities at home than their more affluent peers experience. These additional supports run a wide

spectrum, but can include any (or all) of the following: lack of appropriate medical care, access to healthy food, appropriate and clean clothing, additional academic home supports, and home/family educational experiences. While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, each of these represents some type of barrier that a student of poverty is likely to experience given their family income. As a result, each student that encounters this type of deficit is likely to be at a distinct disadvantage in the learning environment compared with their more affluent peers.

Finally, I would like to address the concept of the “cycle of poverty” and the key principles that have an effect within this environment. There is again a body of research that supports the framework that if/when a child born into poverty does not have specific and targeted interventions to help him/her “break” that cycle, that eventually that individual will invariably repeat that cycle as an adult and ultimately with their own children. I trust that each member of this committee truly seeks to support the best interests of our students and wants to help them improve their lives and ultimately break from this cycle. A school district that is focused on these supports can ultimately become part of that change for a child’s trajectory.

Where this Money is Spent - As we should with any educational dollars, it is fair to evaluate how and where these resources are being directed. While I do not offer to speak on behalf of all districts, it is fair to say that this information is readily available upon request from the districts should this committee desire more information. Furthermore, it should be noted that expenditures from these additional revenues are restricted in nature and are specifically reported within each district’s Local Consolidated Plan.

As a general concept, dollars expensed from high-density at-risk are targeted towards a specific intervention that is based upon the premise of supporting a known deficit. Simply put, each district, and specifically each student has different challenges, and subsequently different supports that are needed. And while supports will vary from district to district, they are grounded on the principle of using research-based structures that are known to have positive impacts. These may include some (or all) of the following: Summer School programming, After School programming, Alternative High School programming, Language Support, Credit Recovery, and Additional In-Class Support. It should be noted that there are other appropriate expenditures that are not listed here, but may be applicable and necessary in other districts.

Fiscal Note - As financial stewards for the taxpaying citizens of the state of Kansas, I believe it is always imperative that we evaluate the costs of any and all potential legislation and the impacts that it will have upon our state. As Budget Director Adam Proffitt has provided, the fiscal note of \$76.8M has been included within Governor Kelly's FY 2024 budget recommendation. However, I believe the more important factor here is that the removal of this sunset does not necessitate any new spending. Rather, the adjustments, if approved as recommended, would allow for the continuation of State General Fund dollars that have been previously allocated in the state's budget. While it is acknowledged that the total fiscal note is certainly of significance in terms of the overall dollars, the critical point that this simply extends dollars already budgeted within the system should not be lost.

On the contrary, if this sunset were not removed and the subsequent weighting were to expire, the effects for districts with high populations of students living in poverty would be extremely detrimental. While it is acknowledged that not all of the 220 districts receive a substantial amount of additional revenue, there are many districts that receive amounts that are significant enough to have a considerable impact. A failure to remove this sunset and allow for this funding mechanism to expire could truly be catastrophic for many districts within our state, forcing them into a spiral of ending programming and eliminating personnel that are currently providing direct supports for students of poverty.

In summary, HB 2223, and specifically the removal of the sunset on high-density at-risk weighting is good legislation that should be considered worthy of passage. While there has certainly been significant discussion about the impact that this will have upon school districts, the more pressing concern is the impact that this will have upon the lives and potential trajectory of students living in poverty. I believe firmly in the power and ability of public schools to positively change the lives of the children of Kansas and wish to see them have the supports necessary to accomplish this. HB 2223 and the removal of the sunset language seeks to accomplish this in its entirety.

Many thanks for your consideration of this testimony, as well as all that you do to support the citizens of the state of Kansas.