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Written Testimony - Opponent
House Bill 2650
House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
February 7, 2024

Chairwoman Williams, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to House Bill 2650.

Kansas NEA believes public education is the gateway to opportunity, and that all students have the human and civil right to a quality education that develops their potential, independence, and character. To that end, we do not object to school districts establishing goals to work towards ensuring all students are having their needs met and are being given all opportunities to succeed. However, we are opposed to penalizing school districts based on the performance of students whose learning is often impeded by outside factors.

At-risk students often don't meet expected academic goals due to situations entirely beyond their control. By definition, these students qualify for free or reduced lunches. These are children living in poverty. Their families may not have the means to provide food for them. They may not have consistent or safe housing. They may not have access to healthcare. They may be the oldest sibling who helps care for younger siblings while their family works multiple jobs. They may struggle with mental health issues. English may not be their native language. The list of these factors of these students goes on and on.

KNEA opposes House Bill 2650 because it fails to consider these factors as it proposes to reduce at-risk funding for school districts based on the performance of the students who need this additional support the most. Furthermore, it fails to consider how the strategies targeted for at-risk students also benefits all students. A lot of research based strategies or programs cost no more to make them available to all students than to just at-risk students.

Additionally, we oppose House Bill 2650 because we believe it will result in segregation of students by placing targets on specific groups. This concern stems from adding "are provided above and beyond regular educational services to students who are identified as at-risk." This bill lacks clarity on what this specifically means. We have educators who currently provide additional resources to at-risk students within their classrooms and with their peers. This allows them to learn alongside their peers without being singled out.

Does this change in definition mean that at-risk students – particularly those identified within the goals set by the local board of education – must be pulled out of their general education classroom to receive services? And, who is responsible for providing these additional services?

Lastly, KNEA opposes House Bill 2650 because we believe that if these at-risk students fail to achieve the goals set by the district not only will the students be penalized, but the educators will be as well.

If the Legislature truly wants to help these at-risk students succeed, KNEA urges that the focus be on addressing the outside factors impacting these students and that this bill be opposed.

Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.