

KANSAS
ASSOCIATION



OF
SCHOOL
BOARDS



1420 SW Arrowhead Road • Topeka, Kansas 66604-4024
785-273-3600

Testimony before the
House Committee on Appropriations
on

~~HB 2193~~ – At-Risk Weighting Calculation
HB 2400

by

Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director for Advocacy
Kansas Association of School Boards

March 30, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on ~~HB 2193~~ ^{*HB 2400*}. The bill would change the basis of at-risk weighting in grades four through twelve from the number of students eligible for free lunch to the number of students who do not meet reading or math proficiency on state tests in the previous year. KASB has consistently supported using free lunch eligibility as the main basis of at-risk funding, and also supports the use of other measures to supplement free lunch. The School Finance Resolution adopted by our members for the current year supports increasing both poverty- and non-poverty based programs to help at-risk students. This bill is estimated to *reduce* at-risk funding by over \$100 million. As a result, we strongly oppose this bill.

Fundamentally, we support using the free lunch indicator because there is abundant evidence that lower income students are more likely to be “at-risk” of academic difficulties. The evidence includes the actual results of state and national assessments, drop-out rates and completion rates for decades, as well as Kansas Legislative Post Audit studies and other national studies.

This does not mean that free lunch students are always going to have difficulties in school. It means that lower income students are much more likely to struggle unless they receive additional support. The reasons are simple: lower income children are less likely to have the stable, supportive environment that students need to excel. It’s not that these students are intellectually less able or that their schools are inferior. The issue is that these children face challenges from outside of the school that affect learning. Hunger, illness, needing glasses or dental care, homelessness, transience, lack of books in the home, parents’ education, vocabulary and ability to assist with homework, difficulty in getting to school, substance abuse, crime, incarceration....the list goes on.

Of course, there are numerous exceptions at both ends of the income scale, but as a general rule schools and districts with more low income students have traditionally had more difficulty getting students to proficiency and beyond. This is true of private schools as well as public.

Appropriations Committee

Date *March 30, 2011*

Attachment *3*

At-risk programs based on income or poverty allow districts to do three things. First, they can put supports in place to help children before they *start* "failing" on state assessments. Second, they allow districts to immediately intervene if students demonstrate they are below proficient. Third, they allow districts to maintain support for these students even after they have achieved proficiency. The same conditions that put students "at-risk" in the first place are likely still present.

~~HB 2193~~ ^{HB 2400}, on the other hand, would only provide funding if students actually fail on state assessments in grades 4-12. Districts would lose resources to help "at-risk" students before they are tested. If schools are successful with these students after they are identified by testing, the districts lose the revenue to support them in the future. Instead of a reasonably stable funding source, at-risk funding would likely rise as test scores fall, then be reduced as interventions are successful, then be increased again as new students enter fourth grade and older students fall behind when support programs are removed. We do not believe this "fail first" model is appropriate.

At-risk funding has significantly increased over the past decade from state, federal and local sources. The track record of that funding is clear. Students scoring proficient or above on the state reading test rose from 70.5 percent in 2004 to 86.3 percent in 2010, and the percentage in math rose from 65.3 to 83.6 percent. For students eligible for free or reduced lunch, proficiency rose from 57.8 to 77.7 percent in reading and 52.2 percent to 75.0 percent in math over the same time period. Stated another way, we can estimate the actual number of students scoring below proficient decreased by about 50,000 in reading and 70,000 in math (assuming an average of approximately 315,000 students in grades 4-12).

The fiscal note for this bill indicates that about 60,000 students would be removed from funding. This is essentially the number of fourth grade and other students who are both proficient *and* qualify for free lunch, and is comparable to the *increase* in the number of students who are now proficient. Because districts increased the number of successful students as funding increased, we believe that reducing that funding by over \$100 million will significantly reduce student achievement.

While we urge you to oppose this bill and maintain at-risk funding at least at current levels, KASB would also support efforts to increase funding for programs targeted at *other* factors causing students to be at-risk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Appropriations Committee

Date March 30, 2011

Attachment 3-2