



Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

Unified School District No. 500

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

HB 2400

January 31, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

I am David A. Smith, chief of staff for the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS).

HB 2400 would radically alter the definition of “At-risk pupils” as it applies to the school finance funding formula. It would replace the current definition of at-risk funding for students in grades 4-12, (which defined them as students who are eligible for free meals under the national school lunch act) with one that defines them as students who scored less than proficient on the state assessments. This change would completely alter the intention of at-risk funding, and have a devastating impact upon children in KCKPS who have benefited tremendously from the current definition. I urge you to reject this change.

School districts are held to a common standard of accountability, which is just as it should be. All students deserve the same opportunity that a strong education provides, regardless of the zip code they live in. At the same time, research has made clear that certain students cost more to get to that standard than other students, because of the challenges that they bring with them to school. Students who grow up in poverty, and are considered at-risk, are capable of reaching the same high levels of achievement as their more advantaged peers, but they need extra resources and support to get there.

Studies by this legislature’s own Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit affirm the value of the current definition of “at-risk student,” as do the funding decisions in the vast majority of other states that provide funding for at-risk students. Our district has used at-risk funding to continue and accelerate the academic achievement of our students, and to close the achievement gap between groups of students.

According to printouts prepared by the Kansas Department of Education last spring, the changes that are proposed in this legislation would cost KCKPS more than \$10 million, and districts that serve at risk students would lost more than \$100 million in funding. This loss would be compounded, should Governor Sam Brownback’s proposed change to the school finance formula go into effect, as next year would serve as the base year for the new formula. This modification of the definition of at-risk would also change Kansas from a state that provides additional funding to support the students who most need it, to one that rewards districts that fail to educate certain students well. Such a change would have a devastating impact on the education of at-risk children across Kansas, and does not represent good public policy.

Due to the damaging impact of this bill on those districts that serve the highest numbers of at-risk students, last year both this committee and the House Education Committee (HB 2193) refused to allow it to advance. We recommend that the Committee on Appropriations take similar action again this year.