

**Senate Education Committee
February 6, 2012
Testimony from Dr. George Griffith
Superintendent Trego County USD #208**

Testimony on SB 361

Thank you for allowing me to express my concerns pertaining to the proposed changes to the school finance formula included in HB 361. **Specifically, I am opposed to the change in the calculation of state aid to Kansas Public Schools.**

There are a number of concerns I have with the proposed changes in the funding formula that I feel would have a negative impact on Kansas children.

- 1) The hold harmless provision of the bill is a good idea; however, this provision locks us into a decreased level of funding resulting from the cuts in education funding we have sustained in recent years. My district alone has faced a total decrease in General State Aid in the amount of \$490,115 during these cuts based on our current enrollment. There is a need to return the previous levels of funding before any hold harmless provision should be put in place. **If funding is not restored to previous levels, Kansas children and schools could face a decline in the achievement we have worked so hard to improve.**

Despite the information some groups have used to indicate our schools are not performing well, specifically NAEP data; Kansas schools and students are performing well and continue to improve. For example in 2006, 79.5 percent of fourth graders across the state scored proficient or higher on the state assessment and this past spring the percent of fourth graders meeting the standards or above was 89 percent. With 89 percent of our students meeting the standards or above on the fourth grade reading assessment, it is clear our Kansas schools and students continue to perform at a high level. As a former education consultant for KSDE, I know our current Kansas State Standards are rigorous and our students' expectations are not watered down as some public officials have indicated.

- 2) The lack of weighting in the funding formula proposed in this bill does not take into account the individual needs of our students and the corresponding additional cost to educate these students at the levels we are expected to continually meet. There is a large body of research that indicates that groups who are identified as At-Risk and/or English Language Learners (ELL) require more intense interventions which are more

costly. Although not perfect, our current weighting system provides an acceptable manner for addressing this problem which the proposed system does not.

- 3) A greater reliance on local funding and not having a limit on local taxing will return Kansas to the days when a child's zip code determined the level of education he or she received. This has been labeled as providing more local control; I believe it is more of a local burden which would result in a need to increase taxes to exorbitant levels in order to provide our students with an equal educational experience. Additionally any local funding sources need to be fully equalized so children no matter where they live are given equal educational opportunities. This is also a requirement of the Kansas Constitution in that any additional LOB must be offset with a higher equalization rate.
- 4) The lack of funding for Bond and Interest will put schools in rural and high poverty areas at a disadvantage as far as having appropriate facilities for students. I was a superintendent in a district that had and still uses buildings constructed in the 1920's and 1930's. My current district has buildings that were constructed in the 1970's and are currently undergoing HVAC and lighting upgrades to save energy costs. This bill would result in a greater tax burden on our property owners who live on fixed incomes if the bond and interest assistance is not provided to offset some of this burden.

I am asking that you do not pass changes that do not first restore funding to previous levels before putting a "hold harmless" provision in place, one that includes weightings, keeps a limit on local funding levels with full equalization, and provides assistance for Bond and Interest.

Thank you again for considering my comments.