

# Emporia Public Schools

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6 February 2012

Senate Education Committee

1:30PM

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill #361

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill #361 –  
Excellence in Education Act

Education is important to the people of our community! We are home to Emporia State University and Flint Hills Technical College. Emporia has always been committed to assuring that all students have opportunities to achieve success.

The demographic makeup of the Emporia community has changed dramatically over the past 15 years (as noted in Chart 1). Last year, 66% of Emporia students qualified for Free and Reduced Price meals; 33% of our incoming kindergarteners required bilingual assistance; and 1,548 or 33% of our students received bilingual support each day throughout the district (Chart 2). According to Dr. Harry Pachon of the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, when a child “starts middle school academically underprepared and English-deficient, he or she is very likely to drop out.” We, in Emporia know first-hand that we must intervene early to short-circuit this pattern of low-achievement which ultimately results in student dropouts.

Therefore we have invested in the staff development, curriculum and intervention strategies necessary to assure that students in Emporia classrooms receive direct, explicit, scientifically research-based instruction from every teacher they encounter throughout the day. Through partnerships with Emporia State University and Kansas State University, we provide classroom teacher training in second-language instructional approaches, develop cultural proficiency, and assure accurate assessment skills for every new teacher every year! (Chart 3) Without a doubt, the transfer of that specialized training into the classroom has made a difference for all students but especially for our English Language Learners and children of poverty. Roughly half of the district’s professional staff has earned full ESL endorsement (Chart 4). Our data demonstrates that the steps taken in Emporia to develop highly skilled teachers and to equip them with research-based resources and materials have made a significant difference for our students!

Emporia Public Schools has worked within the law as it currently exists to produce results (Chart 5). We have been able to accomplish these significant results by taking advantage of the dollars generated through at risk weighting and bilingual clock hours (Chart #6).

It has worked for students! We have created a system for diagnosing needs for second language learners and children of poverty, strategically prescribing intervention within the primary classroom and successfully supporting a continuum of services with appropriately licensed and highly qualified professional staff. As a consequence, our students experience effective classroom instruction suited to their needs and demonstrate extraordinary results!

SB 361 will negatively impact the momentum generated from our success. As stated the Emporia Public Schools has worked within the law as it currently exists to produce results. This bill eliminates the weighting factors designed to recognize the extraordinary challenges faced by children whose first language is not English and the children who live in poverty....and with it, the very resources that make a difference for Emporia kids! If enacted into law, this bill will force us to make decisions that compromise the structure and support we have been able to build...a tragic loss for Emporia students.

SB 361 “locks in funding” to hold harmless the struggles we have addressed. But take notice of the demographic changes our community has experienced! Our enrollment has not simply increased with the influx of bilingual and low SES students – instead, we have welcomed a new and diverse population that rather quickly replaced a middle-to-upper income school community. Moreover, our community has experienced an enrollment decline.....not a loss of bilingual and low SES students....not a reduction in challenge! Yet, SB361 assumes that any new students to Emporia are just like any other student in the state. This BSAPP is nowhere near the actual cost of successfully educating students with the challenge of language and poverty.

We understand that our local community and our state have experienced the strain of financial distress. As a result, we have worked hard to accept our share of the financial constraint imposed. However as our state recovers, should we continue to ask our most challenged patrons to accept less for their children? Should our zip code condemn Emporia students to a life that fully recognizes the bottom of the bell curve?

Twenty years have passed since our state established the current funding formula. Twenty years that have resulted in adjustments that can finally accommodate our state’s demographic changes. It is time that Kansas remembers....and that our state accepts the challenge that its schools have accepted with grace and commitment. Make a difference...for our kids.

Thank you for your attention to this very important issue.

Respectfully,

M. Theresa Davidson  
Superintendent

Robert Scheib  
Assistant Superintendent of Business

Chart 1

# Student Demographics

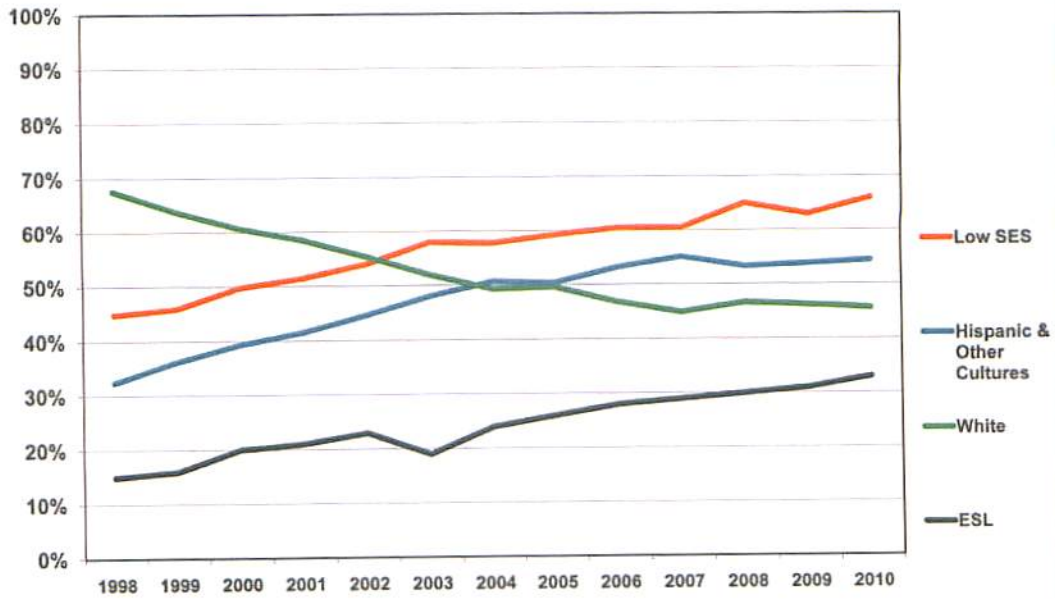


Chart 2

Emporia USD 253 ELL and Total Populations Comparisons 2003 to 2010



Chart 3

USD 253 Annual ESOL College Credit Hours Purchased 2002-03 to 2009-10

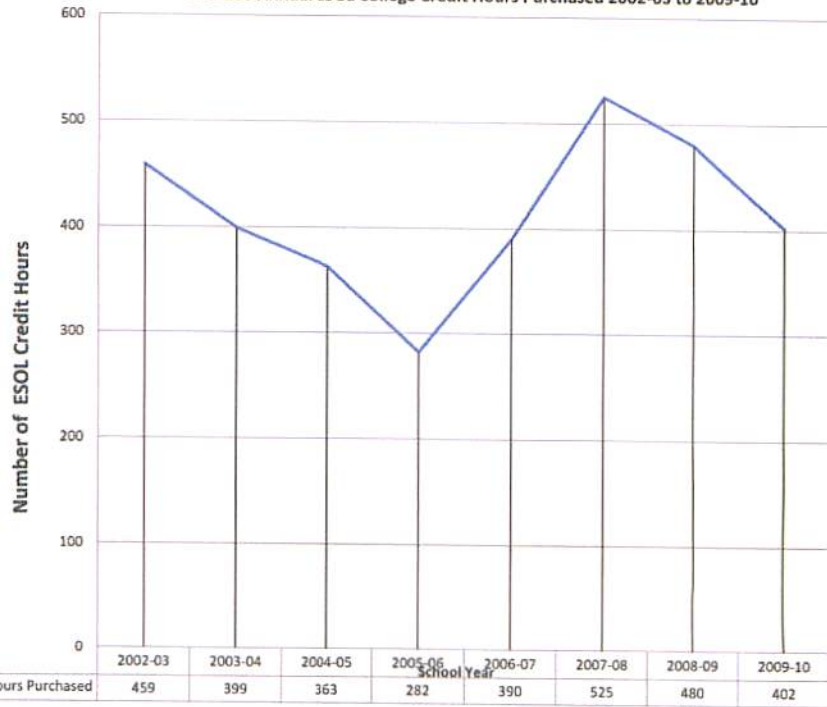


Chart 4

Emporia USD 253 Total Teacher and Endorsed Teacher Counts 2003 to 2010

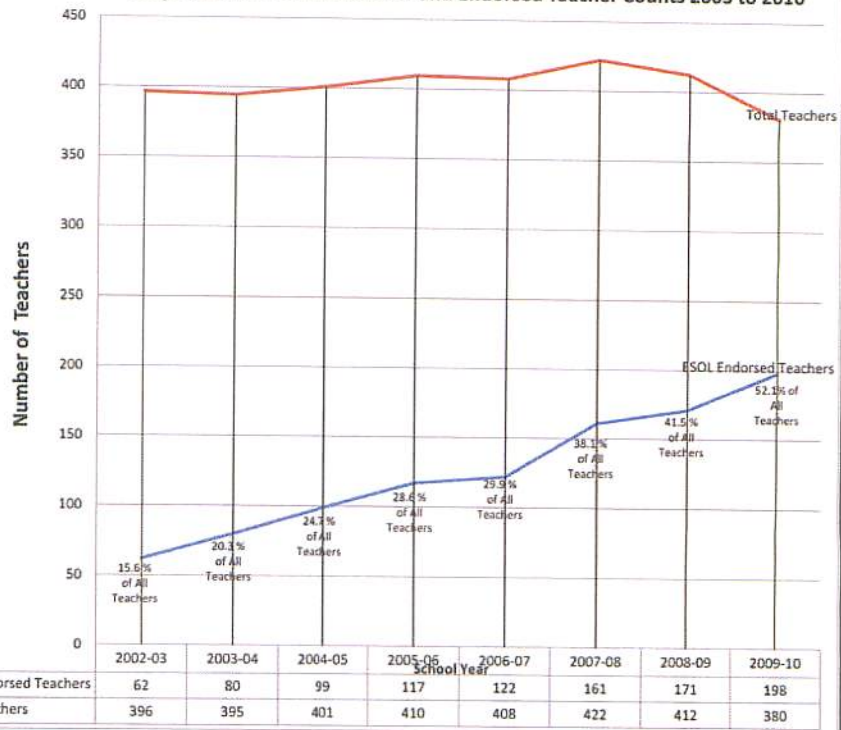


Chart 5

ELL Kansas Math and Reading Assessment Results 2003 to 2010

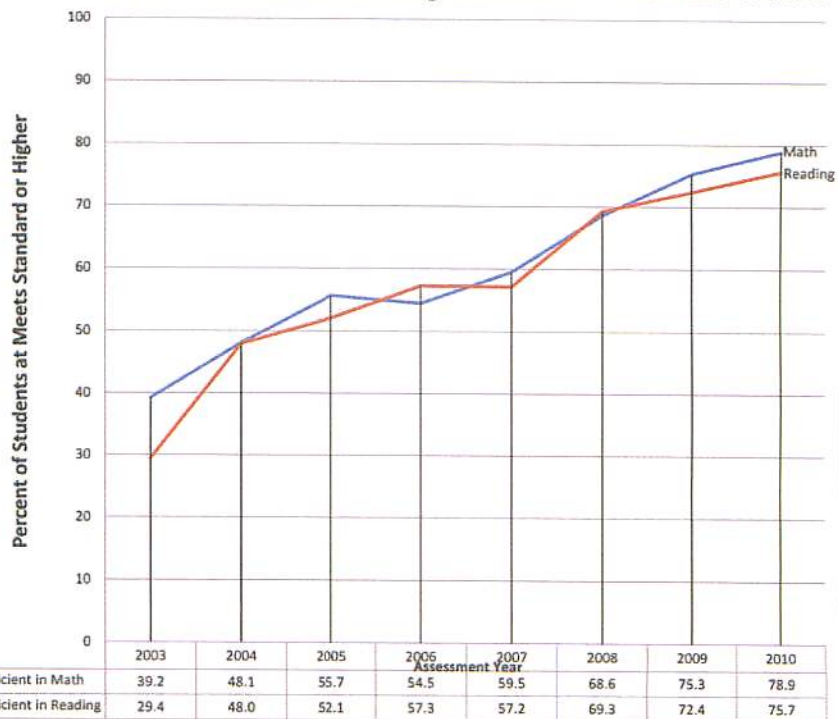


Chart 6

USD 253 Bilingual Funding Received 2002-03 to 2009-10

