



Senate Education Committee
February 12, 2013
SB 103

Chairman Abrams and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on this important issue. My name is Julie Ford, and I am Superintendent of the Topeka Public Schools District. Unlike most other school districts, each of you has had the opportunity to spend some time in USD 501, home of our capital city. As a result, whether you are newly elected or a legislative veteran, you have experienced the diversity of Topeka and its residents. We are a proud city and a proud school district and as with any mid-sized town, our students come from many walks of life. Our educators are dedicated to providing a learning environment that is tailored to each student's individual learning style and personality.

This year 76.7% of Topeka Public Schools' students are eligible for free and reduced meals. The district has grown to 10% English Language Learners (ELL). We have 19% of our students identified for Special Education (SPED). Students in other Shawnee County School districts look very different than our students. I have enclosed a sheet that compares the schools by enrollment, low SES, ELL, SPED and mobility. Internally, we have created a Student Needs Index which helps us allocate resources and support to our most "at risk" schools in Topeka. The purpose of my testimony today is to provide an explanation and analysis of our district's use of "at risk" funds. We use 99.5% of our "at risk" funds for direct instruction, employing strategies that work with our students. A new funding model would cause us to lose around \$700,000 of "at risk" funds that go directly to classrooms.

The bill's concept makes sense, and deals with an issue that I and my fellow administrators grapple with every day. How do we increase the proficiency of our hard to reach students? Why is there such a correlation between proficiency and income level? What more can we do or what can we do differently to produce better outcomes with these students? I hope you understand that our schools and our district are not the same.

I agree with the premise that family income should not dictate success or failure, but too often it does. I have seen students who test that hypothesis every day. Unfortunately, poverty is by far the most common factor among the majority of our students who are most challenged by standardized tests and who lag when it comes to grade level performance. There are, of course, deviations from the norm, as would be expected in any economic equation. There are students that excel who are from families that are considered "at risk" under the current standards. Likewise, there are students not categorized as "at risk", who still require extra attention and tailored, individualized learning plans. And still yet, there are those students that were proficient in core subjects somewhere along the line and for various reasons or no discernible reason at all, lag in performance at one time or another. And beyond that, there are students who excel in areas that are not commonly tested, but who will utilize their strengths to become productive citizens.

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Our current method of funding is not perfect. In fact, it is woefully inadequate when it comes to the funds necessary to meet the individualized needs of each student from grade to grade. Whether you base it on proficiency in certain areas or the current "at risk" standards or any other factors, our district accepts the challenge to equip our children with the tools they need to succeed in the rapidly changing world. Our staff is dedicated to engaging students in the highest quality learning, preparing students for responsible, productive citizenship, and inspiring excellence for a lifetime.

Adequate funding is necessary to ensure that each individual student receives the educational experience that suits their individual needs. This is because their starting line is further back and there are countless obstacles in their path. For some students in our district, the price tag is higher due to greater societal or individual circumstances. No matter the funding formula, those societal outside influences and individual circumstances won't change.

As the Superintendent of a diverse and urban district representing educators working in the classroom with these students, I believe the state cannot avoid accounting for the challenges associated with financing public education equitably and adequately. Those challenges don't change at 3rd grade, nor can any student's needs be precisely valued by a mathematical formula or numerical value. The current "at risk" factors take into account these anomalies while still addressing the reality that societal influences impact the classroom and have to be measured. Too often, these are the students that need the most intervention to achieve proficiency, and without proper supports the quality of education of our students not considered "at risk" will be impacted. It also bothers me personally that this bill provides an incentive to perform poorly, versus allowing "at risk" districts to build quality programs and support for students and their families.

I thank you for your service to our students and their families.

Sincerely,



Dr. Julie Ford
Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools

School	Enrollment	Low SES	ELL	SPED	Mobility	SMI
Quincy	255	96%	30%	19%	24%	170%
Highland Park Central	374	94%	26%	18%	23%	161%
Shaner	212	91%	37%	15%	14%	156%
Lowman Hill	337	89%	18%	23%	25%	155%
Ross	562	91%	17%	19%	15%	141%
McClure	337	89%	18%	23%	11%	141%
State Street	473	88%	17%	19%	11%	136%
Meadows	595	87%	13%	15%	18%	132%
Avondale West	267	81%	19%	18%	10%	128%
Stout	277	89%	0%	18%	18%	125%
Scott	557	93%	5%	12%	10%	119%
Williams	592	87%	0%	17%	14%	118%
Bishop	360	71%	0%	16%	25%	112%
McCarter	431	71%	10%	16%	13%	109%
McEachron	402	72%	0%	16%	15%	104%
Logan Elem	563	63%	3%	27%	10%	103%
Whitson	516	64%	13%	16%	10%	102%
Tecumseh North Elem	362	62%	11%	18%	10%	101%
Pauline Central Elem	470	66%	3%	20%	10%	99%
Randolph	397	64%	0%	17%	12%	93%
Pauline South Elem	316	59%	1%	19%	10%	89%
Wanamaker Elem	473	39%	8%	15%	10%	73%
Rochester Elem	271	41%	0%	15%	10%	66%
Farley Elem	614	30%	0%	21%	10%	62%
Auburn Elem	388	37%	1%	12%	10%	59%
Tecumseh South Elem	480	34%	2%	13%	10%	59%
Berryton Elem	502	26%	0%	19%	10%	55%
Pleasant Hill Elem	309	31%	0%	12%	10%	53%
Shawnee Heights Elem	526	27%	1%	14%	10%	52%
Elmont Elem	309	22%	0%	11%	10%	43%
North Fairview Elem	308	23%	0%	10%	10%	43%
West Indianola Elem	334	19%	0%	12%	10%	41%
Indian Hills Elem	499	16%	5%	7%	10%	39%
Jay Shidler Elem	461	12%	2%	14%	10%	38%
Chase MS	466	93%	5%	20%	30%	148%
Robinson MS	414	82%	0%	28%	27%	137%
Eisenhower MS	452	92%	8%	21%	14%	136%
Landon MS	461	72%	21%	19%	14%	127%
French MS	547	68%	19%	22%	10%	119%
Jardine MS	534	75%	3%	17%	16%	111%
Seaman MS	584	33%	0%	15%	10%	58%
Shawnee Heights MS	590	33%	2%	12%	10%	57%
Washburn Rural MS	888	31%	2%	14%	10%	57%
Capital City	102	82%	0%	100%	75%	257%
Highland Park HS	701	91%	10%	25%	26%	152%
Hope Street HS	128	74%	0%	2%	41%	118%
Topeka High HS	1644	72%	5%	19%	19%	115%
Topeka West HS	972	52%	0%	19%	17%	88%
Shawnee Heights HS	1140	30%	2%	11%	10%	53%
Seaman HS	1194	29%	0%	11%	10%	50%
Washburn Rural HS	1786	26%	1%	12%	10%	49%