

**Testimony before the
Senate Education Committee**

on

Senate Bill 103

submitted by

**Dr. George Griffith, Superintendent, Trego County USD #208, a member
of Schools for Quality Education**

Chairman Abrams and members of the Senate Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and speak on behalf of Schools for Quality Education, an organization comprised of over 100 small, rural school districts in Kansas, and to express our concerns about the proposed change to the definition of "At-Risk" included in SB 103.

Specifically, we are opposed to the change in the definition of "At-risk pupils", that would no longer include all pupils eligible for free lunches in grades four through 12, but only those who are on "Academic Warning" or who do not meet the standard on the mathematics or reading state assessment.

If the changes in SB 103 are adopted, there will be unintended consequences and a negative impact on the most vulnerable children in Kansas.

- 1) According to an August 1992, Statistical Analysis Report from the National Center for Education Statistics: (retrieved February 8, 2013 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs92/92042.pdf>):

Research on the educationally disadvantaged provides a clear portrait of those likely to fail in elementary and secondary schools. Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, from minority groups, or whose parents are not directly involved in their education, are at risk for educational failure—either by failing to learn while in school or by dropping out of school altogether. Over the last decade there has been a growing realization that students from minority backgrounds, low-income families, or both—those students most likely to be "at risk"—are rapidly assuming an unprecedented share of the student population. (p. 1)

Based on this National Report, SB 103 would be detrimental to those students who are most likely to be "At-Risk." I feel this change would be morally and ethically wrong for those children who are from a low socioeconomic home because it would have a negative impact in helping these children from getting a quality education. The loss of funds as a result of this proposed change would result in a decrease in services and increase the probability of these at-risk students falling further behind their more affluent peers.

- 2) Funds obtained based on the current definition of an "At-Risk" student are used to provide programs and staff to help our most vulnerable students be successful in school. SB 103 would be detrimental to districts by removing funding when their at-risk students perform well and benefit districts that are not meeting the educational needs of their students. The loss of funding which occurs when students improve their performance on state assessments would result in the elimination of the very programs and staff members who are providing the services that helped the at-risk students improve their performance.

My district has implemented computer based programs and uses individualized instruction for our students at all grade levels. We also have individualized Student Learning Plans for all students so we can make sure we meet their individual needs. These programs would be difficult to continue if we lose additional funding as a result of the change in the definition of at-risk students. USD 208 has already cut positions and programs over the past four years and further cuts, especially for services to those students who are currently identified at-risk, will have a direct negative impact on the education of these children.

- 3) The change proposed in SB 103 would move Kansas Education from a proactive educational system to a reactive one. As a proactive educational system, we help students with additional educational needs when the interventions are more effective and less costly and not after these students have experienced a level of failure. The proposed change in the definition of at-risk students would cause educators to be reactive and only be able to provide limited assistance for students after they have not been successful. Not only does a reactive system cost more to implement because the interventions needed are more intense, it

also has a negative impact on the child's self-perception. It has been my experience that any student who experiences success gains the confidence to do more than they thought they could. I also have experience with many students who have dealt with academic failure who then expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to anything related to the area in which they have failed which is why a reactive system of intervention is more costly and not good for our children.

I speak not only as a school administrator representing the children of Kansas, but because I was a child from an at-risk home who was told and believed I would not be successful if I went into higher education. It was not until I was in my thirties when I needed to change my career that I discovered my ability to be successful in the academic area, ultimately earning my Ph.D. from KSU in 2009.

We ask that you do not pass the change presented in SB 103 because of the negative impact it would have on the most vulnerable children in our state.

Thank you again for considering my comments.

Dr. George Griffith

