

Senate Committee on Education

February 25, 2013

Hearing on SB 169

Testimony by Jon Hummell, Policy Director, Governor's Office

In Governor Sam Brownback's Road Map for Kansas, he listed 5 key goals. Two of those goals fall within the purview of this committee: 1. Increase high school graduates who are career or college ready. 2. Increase the percentage of 4th graders reading at grade level. With the passage of SB 155 last year, we believe Kansas has made a tremendous step forward in career readiness. This year, SB 169 represents Governor Brownback's proposal to increase the literacy skills of Kansas children. We look forward to working with this committee to make this effort as successful as SB 155.

As the Governor described in his State of the State address, the ability to read well by the 4th grade is a fundamental indicator of a child's future success. You have all heard the statistics. Children who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of high school. Children who read below the basic level are almost 6 times more likely than proficient readers to not finish high school on time. African-American and Hispanic students who struggle to read are 8 times more likely than proficient readers to drop out. And 88% of 19 year old dropouts were non-proficient readers in 3rd grade.

The Kansas Reads to Succeed Act seeks to reduce the number of Kansas children who are unable to read by 4th grade by providing targeted interventions to struggling readers, providing incentives to elementary schools that demonstrate the ability to improve 4th grade reading scores, and ending social promotion of Kansas 3rd graders.

Let me be clear. The purpose of this legislation is not to retain students. The purpose of the bill is to end social promotion for 3rd graders who are not able to read. There are two ways to accomplish this goal. The first way, and far more preferable way, is to make sure every Kansas 3rd grader can read. Kansas taxpayers contribute over \$3 billion a year, over \$12,000 per student to help our children receive a quality education. We owe it to every child to use those resources effectively to give them every opportunity to keep pace with their peers around the state, around the nation and around the world. I know that teachers everywhere are working very hard in the classroom every day to do just that.

However, sometimes an extra ordinary effort is needed to help the children who are struggling. In the Governor's 2014-2015 budget, he provides \$10 million to help provide targeted intervention programs to struggling readers. By partnering with non-profit organizations, school districts can stretch their dollars further and take greater advantage of the time, energy, and resources of community partners. The 30% private sector match requirement will help the state maximize our investment in this effort and result in an additional \$3 million to help struggling readers. By working through the bi-partisan Children's Cabinet, we can engage Kansas leaders from the private sector, the legislature, and the non-

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profit community. We can also synchronize this K-3 program with the tremendously important Pre-K programs already administered by the Children's Cabinet. I might note here that the Governor proposed over \$100 million for Pre-K programs in his budget. It is our sincere hope that over time the combination of these efforts will render social promotion obsolete because every Kansas child will know how to read.

As we also know, despite our best efforts and intentions, some Kansas children are still unable to read at the basic level. In 2012, 4.9% of Kansas 3rd graders scored in the lowest achievement category on the state assessment. If this bill were law today many of those students would be granted an exemption to the retention policy outlined in the bill for Special Education and English Second Language students. However, it is time for Kansans to ask ourselves if it is in the best interest of a child who scores in the lowest category of a reading assessment and does not qualify for one of the exemptions to be promoted to the next grade even though we know he/she will continue to struggle. Is it fair to the teacher who knows a child is a year behind the moment he/she walks through the door for 4th grade? You have heard testimony from Dr. Winters that describes his findings on the long-term impact of a retention policy on children. I would ask you to consider the information he has provided with an open mind. Several other states have enacted or are considering proposals similar to the one before you today. Earlier this month, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed similar legislation by a wide margin with strong bipartisan support. The Governor understands the retention policy is likely to cause many unpleasant conversations between parents and educators. No parent wants to hear their child is struggling. No teacher or principle wants to tell a parent their child must be held back. But we have to ask ourselves what is more important. Doing what is easiest for the adults? Or doing what is best for the children?

Finally, I would like to talk about local control. As Kansans, we generally value and protect our ability to make decisions at the most local level possible. You are likely to hear that concern expressed in regards to this bill. I would like to call your particular attention to the language in the bill allowing for alternative assessments. What this language means is that if a local school board and superintendent would prefer not to use the standard state assessment for the purposes of this bill they can use an assessment of their choosing. Local districts also have the flexibility to determine the timing and frequency of the alternative assessments. I expect that nearly every school district in Kansas will take advantage of these opportunities.

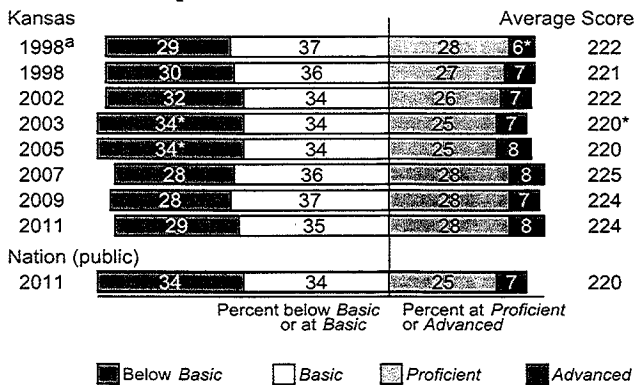
Despite the flexibility provided you are likely to hear from education officials that this bill usurps local control. I expect you have heard that concern already in testimony on other bills. I expect you will hear that concern as you consider nearly every education reform bill that comes before you. What is interesting to me is the circumstances under which you do not hear that concern expressed. The Obama Administration has pushed a very aggressive education reform agenda from the federal level and yet you don't often hear an outcry for local control in response to those efforts. In fact, many in the education community seem to embrace reform from the federal government. If we truly believe those closest to the people are best equipped to determine the policies that affect them, why do they embrace reforms from President Obama from Washington D.C. and oppose reforms from Chairman Abrams from Ark City, Vice Chair Arpke from Salina, and Governor Brownback from Parker.

As I said earlier, Kansas taxpayers contribute over \$3 billion to provide a quality education to our children. As elected officials, the legislature and the Governor have a responsibility to make sure those resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. If a single child graduates from high school without being able to read, we have all failed.

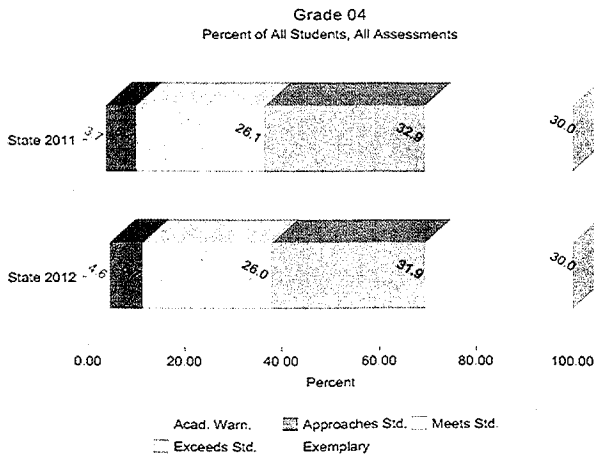
Kansas Reads to Succeed: 4th Grade Reading

Kansas teachers work hard each and every day to instruct and educate our state's greatest treasure, our children. We must equip teachers and schools with the tools that allow them to establish a strong foundation for the future success of our state's children. One of the cornerstones of a strong educational foundation is the ability to read proficiently. Data from Kansas shows that not enough of our children are reading well:

- According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th grade reading scores, in 2011
 - 29% of Kansas 4th graders read below the "basic" level and
 - 64% of Kansas 4th graders scored below the "proficient" level.



- According to the Kansas State Department of Education, 11.3% of Kansas 4th graders read below "Standard" in 2012 on the state reading assessments.



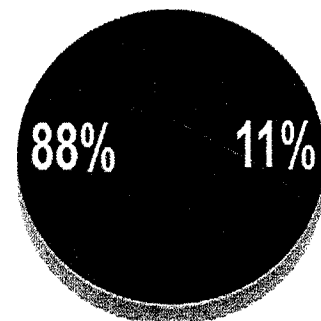
Data from across the United States shows that kids who cannot read struggle to succeed:

- According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation:
 - Children who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade are 4 times more likely to not graduate high school.
 - Children who read below the basic level are almost 6 times more likely than proficient readers to not finish high school on time.
 - Poor black and Hispanic students who are struggling readers are about 8 times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school.
 - 88% of 19 year old dropouts were non-proficient readers in 3rd grade.

Predicting Dropout Rates by 3rd Grade Reading Performance

19 Year Old Dropouts by 3rd Grade Reading Scores

-- Annie E Casey Foundation



- Non Proficient Readers in 3rd grade
- Proficient Readers in 3rd grade

Excellence

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The Goal

In Governor Sam Brownback's Road Map for Kansas, he pledged to improve education by increasing the percentage of Kansas 4th graders who are reading at grade level. This goal stems from the Governor's desire that all Kansas children, the future leaders of our great state, wake up each and every day to a state that better facilitates opportunities for their success. Education is the bridge to this success. Children need to learn early and often in their lives to be successful adults and responsible citizens.

A goal of the Governor's administration this legislative session is to ensure that each of the kindergartners in Kansas today are able to read proficiently by the time they reach the 4th grade. To meet this goal, the Governor has proposed a new policy and funding to promote better reading outcomes in Kansas.

The Plan

The state must target resources and innovations to solving Kansas' 4th grade reading challenge in order to shift the trajectory of our students from prospects of mediocrity to futures of excellence. Kansas Reads to Succeed is a policy initiative that aims to hit this target:

