

Testimony in Opposition to HB2242
Any New School Finance Formula Must Be Based on Actual Costs
by
Dr. Walt Chappell

First, I would like to compliment the Chair and members of this Committee for taking this job of trying to develop a new school finance formula seriously. Since the 1992 formula was enacted, it has been clear that it was not providing adequate or equal funding to educate our kids. The various weights have little to do with the actual cost of teaching students. Now, with a Court decision pending, you have been given the nearly impossible task of developing and passing a new formula before the end of this legislative session.

The sincere effort to draft HB2242 starts the dialogue—but falls far short of what is needed. To start with, each Kansas school is a cost center of education—not the classroom. It is the unique mix of learning needs in each school which determines the instructional resources required to provide an equal opportunity for each student to receive a quality education and graduate—ready to succeed in college or a career.

HB2242 makes an attempt to look at classroom costs but only in four pilot school districts who volunteer. This sample size in Sec. 16 is far too small and needs to be random. There are major instructional cost differences between classrooms and schools of various sizes within the four Congressional districts.

The definition of a classroom is too broad and will allow districts to pad their budgets. Some classrooms will have five students or less while others may have 25 or more. Obviously, the cost/student will vary greatly.

Likewise, the definition of a “teacher” must not include teacher aides or paraprofessionals who are not qualified to teach. Since the Montoy decision, districts hired 9,000 new employees to teach the same number of students. Only 40% of those new hires were certified teachers. The amount of money spent has nearly doubled but still, only 1-in-3 students is proficient or has ACT scores high enough to succeed in college.

Limiting a cost analysis in each of the four Congressional districts to once every 10 years as called for in Sec. 3 is not realistic. Enrollment and the mix of student learning needs fluctuate yearly. Plus changes in curriculum means that the formula must be able to respond.

HB2242 does not appear to show how the average classroom cost of instruction in Sec. 4 will be calculated. Using the consumer price index for yearly adjustments does not take into account the unique mix of learning needs or the resources required to teach the students attending each school. Also, the actual cost of instruction varies greatly between strictly academic areas like math and history as compared to CTE courses.

Furthermore, there is no formula in Sec. 5 to be used by the KSDE to disperse the amount of state aid required each month by each school district. Districts budget for a school year and have annual contractual obligations with their teachers, administrators and staff—not monthly.

The rest of HB2242 as well as HB2270 are based on the old 1992 formula. None of the efficiencies recommended by three separate legislative Interim Committees are included to make sure that up to \$800 million of current funding actually gets spent to teach Kansas students. These efficiencies and cost controls plus the new State Board vision for Kansas need to be included in any new formula developed and passed by the Legislature.

Attached to this testimony are recommendations of how a new funding formula can be developed and implemented which will assure the Constitutional requirements of an adequate and equal opportunity for each Kansas K-12 student to receive a quality education. It starts with documenting the actual cost of instruction in a random-stratified sample of 30 schools to teach the courses required by the Legislature and State Board to graduate from high school and be ready to succeed in college or career.

Until this unit-cost analysis is done, no actual cost evidence can be provided or a new formula developed to convince the Supreme Court that adequate and equal funding is being provided for Kansas K-12 schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Walt Chappell, President
Educational Management Consultants
(316)838-7900 / educationalmanagers@cox.net