

Testimony before the
House Committee on K-12 Education Budget
on

HB 2270 At-Risk Weighting

by

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Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Please allow me to express my appreciation for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding at-risk weighting in HB 2270. My name is Aaric Davis, Superintendent of Royal Valley USD 337, located 15 miles north of Topeka with a student population around 840 students. I would like to start by stating how very happy I am with the structure of HB 2270 with exception to the use of the census poverty data beginning in year 3 of the implementation of the formula.

I was provided information this week regarding the census poverty level in the Royal Valley School District and I found that there is a major discrepancy between the free lunch status count that has been used for school finance in past years and the proposed change in 2019-2020 to the census poverty data. This past year, Royal Valley had 335 of its 837 students with free lunch status, which for next year would be multiplied by .456 and add 152 FTE to account for the added cost to teach at-risk students. If you take 152 multiplied by the foundation state aid per pupil (FSAPP) of \$4,253 that would amount to \$646,456 in state aid to help with the education of the at-risk population.

I would like to move two years forward to the 2019-2020 school year and look at the at-risk funding using the proposed formula with the same data. In 2019-2020 to figure at-risk funding, I would multiply the census poverty data of 81 students by twice the .456 factor (.912), which would add 73 FTE to our weightings to account for the added cost to teach at-risk students. If you take 73 multiplied by \$4,681 (FSAPP for that year) that would amount to \$341,713 in state aid to help with the education of the at-risk population. In 2019-2020, the free lunch count of 335 which would translate to 152 FTE multiplied by \$4,681 (FSAPP) would amount to \$711,512. The difference between the census poverty level calculation and the free lunch calculation would be **a reduction of \$369,799** (\$711,512 - \$341,713) for USD 337 in 2019-2020.

State-Wide Effect - I am aware that the calculations do not come out this unfavorable in all districts, but this change would create a massive reduction for our small school district. My calculations show that there will be 75 school districts in the state that will either break even, or see increased funding in at-risk calculations using the census poverty data. There will be 211 school districts in the state that will see reduced funding using the census poverty data compared to the free lunch calculation. Of those 211 districts, 18 school districts would see their at-risk funding reduced by more than 50%, including Royal Valley.

Accuracy of Census Data - I have set out to determine why this discrepancy between the two calculations exist for my district and I have come to the conclusion that the census estimate is just that, an estimate based upon good faith reporting by constituents, and is not reliable for some unknown factor in the Royal Valley School District and possible other districts around the state.

The census poverty data shows that the Royal Valley has 9.0% of its students living under the federal poverty level. In comparison, the nearby district of Auburn-Washburn school district census poverty data shows that it has 9.1% of its students living under the federal poverty level. Currently, Royal Valley has 41.5% of its students on free lunch status and Auburn-Washburn has 25.9% of its students on free lunch status, 15.6% less than Royal Valley and according to the census poverty data, Royal Valley has less poverty.

The same occurs for a similar sized district in the region, Mission Valley. Mission Valley has a census poverty level of 8.9% and a free lunch percentage of 28.8%. When compared to Royal Valley, that is a 12.7% difference in free lunch status and only a 0.1% difference in poverty level between our two districts.

Royal Valley ranks 267th out of 286 in assessed valuation per pupil, meaning that the assessed valuation per pupil for our district is less than 266 other school districts in the state of Kansas. When I look at our rank in the census poverty data across the state, Royal Valley is ranked 47th out of 286. This would assert that Royal Valley has less poverty than 239 other school districts across the state. In assessed valuation per pupil, Auburn-Washburn ranks 153rd out of 286 and Mission Valley ranks 156th out of 286.

The census poverty data asserts that these three school districts are the same in terms of poverty levels and using the other two metrics, I do not believe that to be true.

Proposed Change to HB 2270 - I would propose that the House amend HB 2270 to continue to use the free lunch status continuously and not change to the census poverty data for the 2019-2020 school year and after. The free lunch count is an actual count of students being served in the districts and by using the previous year's data; the legislature will know the cost while developing their budget. I believe the census data to be inaccurate for the Royal Valley School District and for other districts around the state. There are some districts that would see increased funding using the census poverty and would not be serving those students in their schools, which creates inequity as well. Thank-you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have for me on this topic.