



**Senate Select Committee on Education Finance**  
**S.B. 251**  
**Senator Denning, Chairman**

May 19, 2017  
John Allison  
Superintendent

Chairman Denning, members of Committee:

Over the past two weeks I have had the privilege to participate in thirteen high school graduations, greeting students and families from all walks of life, all with the same high expectation of success for their children. The Class of 2017 has been offered over \$34 million in scholarships! Our future is bright, but **so** much more could have been done if the prior – constitutional - formula had been funded and not repealed.

Kansas schools are doing well, but we can do better, and we need to.

Chairman Denning and members of the committee: Thank you for working towards a school finance plan. Together we can achieve the mutual goals of high expectations and bright futures for students.

Wichita Public Schools students represent tomorrow's workplace – they are highly motivated, talented, and very diverse young people. Our students speak more than 114 languages and come from 110 countries of birth. Our schools today reflect tomorrow's workforce. The time our students spend together, learning from each other, will uniquely prepare them for jobs which have not been invented in a rapidly changing world.

School districts need a school finance formula which advances educational priorities set by the State Board of Education. Components will need to include an adequate foundation base, targeted funding for students who struggle to learn, support for economically disadvantaged students and non-English speakers, equalization aid, enhanced focus on early childhood, provision for operational and facilities costs, and a mechanism to keep pace with inflation. Today our schools serve increased numbers of students who have social and behavioral issues requiring additional support staff. A formula should allow districts to invest in *the people* who can lead new programs, including early childhood, expanded learning opportunities and career exploration. These are a few of the best practices to engage students in relevant learning activities.

The bill before you today does not provide adequate funding for Kansas schools to meet the State Board of Education goals. There are two prongs to the school finance conversation: "through structure and implementation" or the formula and funding. The structure of this bill is generally positive, although there are provisions with which we disagree. The implementation (or funding) portion of this bill does not meet the \$893m recommendation of the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) to meet standards. We support funding levels which meet the State Board of Education's recommendations.

We agree the foundational aid per student, adjusted for demographic differences, is a solid framework to build a formula. The base per pupil in this bill is inadequate. We believe the base should be increased to \$4604 in FY 18 and \$5090 in FY 19 as recommended by the State Board of Education to meet the Kansans Can goals and workforce needs.

Meeting the challenges and educational needs of students from poverty, or who are English language learners (ELL), will require additional resources and funding. We support the House committee position to adjust at risk weighting to .484, which was the recommendation of the LPA Cost Study.

English language learners are currently weighted at .395. This weighting should not be lowered. The number of ELL students is the fastest growing subgroup in Kansas. Wichita educates over 8000 ELL students, representing 114 languages, who were born in 110 countries. During the block grant, our district received over 300 refugee students. Many have had little or no educational experience in their native language. They come to us at all ages – kindergarten students are absorbed in a regular classroom, but high school-aged students require a sheltered classroom. Each of these students is a member of our community and our state, and it is in our best interest to provide resources to help them learn. We urge the committee to not reduce the ELL weighting.

We are concerned special education remains underfunded in this proposal. Statute provides for 92% of special education costs to be funded. It is important to remember that special education is a federal and state mandate. When special education is underfunded, districts are still required to provide services, and forced to make reductions in other areas, in order to fund those services. Wichita has been underfunded over \$32 million in special education aid over the past six years. We urge this committee to fully fund the special education mandate.

The expansion of the capital outlay mill levy, both in terms of amount and use, is a concern. One mill raises vastly differing amounts across the state, and while this is equalized to the 81.2 percentile, state aid does not completely make up the difference. Expanding capital outlay is a benefit for districts with greater assessed valuation per pupil. They are able to easily increase their mill levy, and their voters are the least likely to protest those increases. Expanding capital outlay, through the mill levy and expanded purpose, will benefit those districts with the greatest wealth. We do not support this provision. The most even-handed way to assist districts to pay for the cost of operations is to fund the foundation base per pupil.

Finally, we applaud the provision of full funding for all-day kindergarten, and the expansion of early childhood programs. We have four schools who each would like to add a pre K classroom. In a community with high poverty, quality early childhood programs are needed. We appreciate the inclusion of this funding.

To wrap up, I would like to express our grave concern over not meeting the June 30 deadline. Not finding an acceptable solution by June 30, 2017 places the state's education financing system in jeopardy of being "constitutionally invalid and therefore void." Disrupting schools will disrupt families of our students, employees, payroll and vendor payments. Schools are a sizable portion of the local economy.

A great deal of work goes on behind the scenes to prepare for a new school year. Hundreds of thousands of lines (representing every course completed) are rolled into the schedules for next school year. This process takes three weeks in Wichita. The budget for the current school year must be closed and rolled into the next school year. Tax levies must be presented to the county by August 25. Dozens of gyms are stripped and waxed, thousands of classrooms are deep-cleaned. Thousands of musical instruments are maintained and restored. Much unheralded work happens behind the scenes to prepare our schools for next August.

A closure of schools in July will cause an undesirable ripple. If we can't roll over student data, we will not be able to start school as scheduled. Upgrades for software applications are scheduled during the summer. Employees who fear missing a paycheck may leave. Will we be able to meet payroll in July, or meet quarterly unemployment and state income tax payments, report quarterly federal tax withholdings, or July KPERS payments, along with court-ordered child support or wage garnishments? Vendor payments would be delayed, impacting businesses, including the \$5 million the districts pays to medical vendors in July.

Mr. Chairman, thank you and the committee for your time and work. I am confident that, working cooperatively, we can find a solution which will return our school finance formula to a constitutional form with funding required to prepare our students for success.

State Board of Education Budget Recommendations

Program	FY 2018 Additional Amount Requested	FY 2019 Additional Amount Requested
Base State Aid Per Pupil	\$4,604—519,425,945	\$5,090—306,502,455
Supplemental General Fund (LOB)	3,509,252	10,000,000
Capital Outlay	2,000,000	2,000,000
Special Education	31,194,055	9,303,490
All-Day Kindergarten	No Change	No Change
Parents as Teachers (CIF)	460,000	No Change
Mentor Teacher	3,000,000	No Change
Professional Development	4,250,000	No Change
Transportation	No Change	No Change
School Lunch	No Change	No Change
Agriculture in Classroom	35,000	No Change
Communities in School	35,000	No Change
KACEE	35,000	No Change
National Board Certification	47,500	No Change
Pre-K Pilot (Tobacco)	900,000	No Change
Tech Ed Transportation	800,000	No Change
Discretionary Grants	No Change	No Change
TOTAL	\$ 565,691,752	\$ 327,805,945

2 Year Total: \$893,497,696