

Senate Select Committee on Education Finance
Testimony, February 6, 2019
By Darrel Harbaugh, President
Bob Toesky-Vice President
Dr. Craig Correll - Superintendent
Coffeyville, USD 445 Board of Education

Madam Chairperson and distinguished committee members, my name is Darrel Harbaugh, with me today is our School Board VP Bob Toesk, Superintendent Dr. Correll and I serve as president of the USD 445 Board of Education in Coffeyville. We are here today in support of Senate Bill 44.

Adequate and equitable funding of Kansas public schools is absolutely critical to the success of our state. There is no greater responsibility of state government than providing for public schools. With the disparity of wealth throughout our great state, it is imperative that the legislature meet its obligations in providing quality schools. Kansas children should be afforded equal opportunity regardless of where one resides. As you know, last year the Legislature took a significant step toward fulfilling its constitutional obligation by passing a five-year, \$520 million school funding package. I encourage you to continue moving forward in meeting the needs of our children. Please do not retreat to the past because of party affiliation, politics or fear.

USD 445 is at the forefront of the Kansans Can mission to help all students be successful. We have a 0-5 preschool. We have an age-to-age kindergarten housed in a local nursing home. We have one large elementary school housing grades K-6 for the entire district thus serving a diverse population that is reflected in the community as a whole and enabling us to close the achievement gap. Our fastest growing population is our non-English speaking students. We are at the forefront of social-emotional learning and understanding brain trauma. Both our middle and high schools are integrating social emotional learning while striving to prepare each individual student for college and career success. And, like every district in Kansas, we work hard to have competitive salaries and recruit qualified teachers. None of our successes would have been possible without creative and hard-working administrators and staff. Juggling funds in order to minimize the impact to classrooms has been a high wire act in need of the safety net of adequate school funding. As a matter of fact, where we have failed is a direct result of underfunding the school finance formula. We have done our best, but class sizes in some grade levels are creeping up and some support positions such as media specialists, counselors and other support staff go unfilled. We have a great relationship with our local community college. However, in a time when we know vocational training is an absolute necessity, these programs require funding. Local business and industry leaders have consistently encouraged us to ensure our students are prepared for the workforce. Jobs are available in our community, however many of these jobs require advanced technical training. Equipment and supplies for vocational programs are dollars well spent.

Like many districts in the state, we have tried our best to keep teacher salaries competitive with neighboring states. The teacher shortage is real in our districts. Candidates with degrees in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) areas are hard to come by, yet we know how vital these programs are for our graduates. Even elementary teachers have become hard to

find. The result is larger class sizes and students being taught by individuals without the proper training and skills necessary to ensure our students are successful after high school. Teacher salary is only a part of the shortage. Teachers also state a lack of support as another obstacle. We need to provide more support staff to meet the emotional needs of our students. The underfunding of mental health efforts in Kansas has led to a shortage in staff in this area also.

We have a mental health issue on our hands with our students. Additional funding is needed to support restorative practices and resilience building with counselors, therapists and support staff to identify needs, teach replacement behaviors and heal significant traumas with access to trauma and counseling services that happen daily in our schools. Additional support staff in this area (counselors, social workers, teacher aides) are critical to the overall success of any school district.

I encourage each of you to act quickly and resolve the issue of school finance during these early days of the session. Kansas children and school employees have been held hostage year after year as the legislature deliberates what to do about school funding. Now is the time to put the children of Kansas first. Imagine a session where you resolve the biggest state expenditure first rather than putting it off until the end of the session. I do not presume to know the everyday life of a state legislator, but I ask that past biases be put aside. I hope that each of you will approach every issue with fresh eyes and an open mind. I urge you to work together to resolve the most pressing state issue of the past decade, adequate and equitable funding of our public schools. SB 44 is an excellent place to begin.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.