



**KANSAS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

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**Oral, Proponent Testimony before the
Senate Committee on Education
on
SB 173 – At-risk Weightings and Programs
by
Mark Tallman, Associate Executive Director
Kansas Association of School Boards
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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of SB 173. As we understand this bill, it contains provisions that were developed and agreed upon last session by various parties, including KASB. We offer support for the following reasons.

1. It extends the high-density at-risk weighting.

To be clear, we believe this weighting factor should be made permanent. There is clear evidence that districts with higher percentages or concentrations of low-income students face greater challenges in helping those students reach academic standards.

This need was identified in the 2006 Kansas Legislative Post Audit K-12 cost study, which recommended an additional weighting factor beyond the regular weighting based on the number of free lunch eligible students. Currently, this factor provides over \$50 million in state funding targeted at the state's highest poverty districts.

There are a number of possible reasons why high poverty districts have these additional challenges, but one thing is clear: allowing the high-density weighting to expire will remove resources from students who need it most. If not made permanent, the high density weighting needs to be extended, and we recommend the longest extension possible.

2. It contains appropriate criteria for determining students who receive at-risk services.

This bill places in state statute the criteria for receiving at-risk services based on current criteria determined by the State Board of Education and adds one more: identification as a student with dyslexia. KASB supported and participated in the Legislative task force on dyslexia and supports efforts to provide additional services to such students.

It is important to remember that the school finance system used student and family income, as measured by free meals, to determine the amount of funding a district receives, but uses these criteria to determine which students actually receive services, whether or not they qualify for free meals.

3. It specifically allows districts to use at-risk funding for professional development.

This additional funding will help educators apply the most current research-based practices to programs serving at-risk students.

4. It increases accountability while maintaining flexibility.

The bill continues both the current law and practice of having the State Board of Education approve school district at-risk programs and expenditures. However, based on Legislative concerns of a 2019 LPA audit, this bill adds new clarifying language and reporting requirements. We support these changes with following understandings.

First, the bill directs the State Board of Education to prepare a list of approved at-risk programs based on best practices and requires districts to use programs from the list, with one exception. It will allow districts to experiment with “provisional” programs not on that list for up to three years. This will let districts try new approaches that may not have been recognized by current research but show promise.

Second, it allows districts to continue to use at-risk funds on programs which are targeted at at-risk students but may be also benefit students who are not at-risk.

Although KASB does not agree with every provision in the bill, we appreciate Sen. Baumgardner’s efforts last session to find a compromise based on work in the Kansas House, concerns of education organizations and others.

Thank you for your consideration.