

Testimony before the
Senate Education Committee

on

SB 144

by

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Testimony provided on behalf of the USA-Kansas and Kansas School Superintendents Association

Madam Chair and members of the committee

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

Our organization stands in support of SB 144

High-density at-risk funding is vital to the growth and safety of many individual students in Kansas schools. We believe making high-density at-risk permanent as in SB 144 will provide confidence in schools they can invest in long term solutions to support Kansas kids with the highest needs.

Although there are a number of successful strategies for working with at-risk students the challenge exists uncovering the root of the issue. Often the path leads back to social, emotional, or learning challenges that directly or indirectly interfere with student's success in school, unfortunately seldom does one sweeping intervention work with all students. The manifestation of an at-risk student might appear to be low test scores, incomplete computation skills, reading difficulties, or acting out, but often those are results, not symptoms. Simple interventions such as lower-class sizes, additional academic support, peer mentoring/tutoring, and a host of other programs can and will show incremental improvements for students, especially when students live in a caring supportive family network.

The reality looks different for other students attending our schools. Some students require hands-on experiences or close contact with career opportunities as they look for a path forward, others require interventions within small groups or resources, while others have significant learning gaps that require a number of specific interventions.

For students living in homes with uncertainties, basic safety needs unmet, financial concerns, and even abuse, a student's social and emotional needs must be met before true learning can occur. In many of our schools that receive high-density at-risk funding, they have a higher percentage of students who require non-traditional academic supports. These needs can often include non-traditional programs, such as counseling groups before school starts, having clean clothes or shoes for school, daycare for younger siblings, health needs, a safe place to study, and the list goes on. Please don't be lulled into

thinking this only happens in our urban centers, this is becoming more common in our suburban and rural areas of the state as well.

It is difficult to support these social and emotional elements in the traditional at-risk program. They require [continued interventions](#) that can often change from month to month with additional staff such as counselors, social workers, psychologists, and others skilled to access non-academic resources. Often these needs must be met before students can truly begin to learn. You might say to yourself these are not the responsibilities of the school and you could be right, but with the changes for community/county services and juvenile justice programs, families look to schools for these resources.

We encourage your support for this bill so our schools can continue to receive the resources necessary to meet the growing needs of our students, giving teachers and other school professionals the opportunities to provide social, emotional, and academic resources needed to help our students grow.