

My name is Michelle Hilliard and I lead the alternative school for Maize USD 266, known fondly as Complete High School Maize. This is my 17th year at the alternative school and 30th year in education. There are many things for which I am uncertain, but one that I am confident of is that HB 2650 is detrimental to the education of at-risk students.

We have three goals at our school. The first is to provide a quality academic environment that leads to the awarding of a high school diploma. The second is to provide students with the personal/social living skills that will help them be successful for life and third is to provide vocational guidance and placement that will lead to successful career attainment. We are able to do all these things because our district uses necessary at-risk money to ensure our program can continue to be the successful program it has proven to be the last 25 years, graduating 660 students who would not otherwise have earned their diploma

The population of students my staff works with are students who struggle in school for a multitude of reasons. My students come to us with severe anxiety, drug issues, they have been bullied in school, they have had chronic attendance issues, they come to school for lunch and to shower because they may not have their basic needs met at home, and a plethora of other issues. I have multiple stories of students who do not have electricity in their homes or are living out of abandoned cars. With the range of issues they are dealing with, at-risk students come to us with academics as the lowest priority. Because of our program (funded with at-risk money) we have students who may not have a 3 or 4 on a state assessment, but who are attending WSUTech and will graduate high school with certifications from there. We have students who may not have a 3 or 4 on a state assessment, but are going straight to work at a Textron or Spirit because of the experiences we are able to give them at our school. We have students who may not have a 3 or 4 on a state assessment, but have gone to cosmetology school, or a community college or a four year university. If you tie funding to a test score, none of these students have the chance to be productive members of our society. We can provide documentation of students from the past 25 years who have successful careers, are raising wonderful families, who are productive members of society, who are law abiding, and who did not score a 3 or 4 on a state assessment. We have former students who are now welders, plumbers, cosmetologists, aircraft and manufacturing workers, a published children's book author, supervisors, military personnel, and many other careers who did not score a 3 or 4 on their state

assessments. Implementing this bill would pull funding that has helped hundreds of students reach success who otherwise would have continued to struggle as at-risk students, potentially leading to an increased dropout rate and financial strain on the people of Kansas.

I have students who are proud of who they are becoming while at our school and they are happy to tell their success stories to anyone who will listen; I have yet to have one of them include their state assessment scores in their story. We would be happy to share our stories with you, as well as help you understand why HB 2650 would be detrimental to the well being of so many of our students.

We believe so strongly in our mission and are so proud of our students' success that we welcome you in any time. Please reach out to schedule a time to come tour our program and talk with our students and staff. While you are here you will see that a test score does not define them or their future. We have two upcoming graduations you are welcome to attend next week which are uplifting and would affirm to you what is important about education.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michelle Hilliard

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