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HB 2650– Requiring school districts to establish an at-risk plan accountability

Written-only testimony in SUPPORT

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To: The House K-12 Education Budget Committee

Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2650.

I, for one, was really looking forward to seeing the Kansas Department of Education’s new list of approved programs for at-risk students. You see, I’m an education advocate. I’m the mom of two smart kids who have dream careers in the STEM sciences. And good public schools give kids options. Options are wonderful things. (*Disclosure: I’m married to Mike O’Neal who works for KPI, but I am providing this testimony only on my behalf, and this does not represent Mike or KPI.*)

As Kansans, do we believe that *all* kids deserve options? Or just certain kids in certain neighborhoods?

According to the Kansas Department of Education website:

- Only 7 out of 100 Black high school students in Kansas are academically prepared in mathematics (see graph, below). I worry about the 93% percent of Black students going to our schools who attend for 12+ years but have not received a successful preparation for grade level math.

The free/reduced lunch (poverty) demographic is similar, with 9% of those Kansas kids unprepared in math.

But consider these statistics:

- **Completing advanced math courses in high school has a greater influence on whether students will graduate from college *than any other factor – including family background.***
- **Taking advanced math has a more direct impact on *future earnings than any other factor.***
- **High school students who take advanced math have higher incomes ten years after graduating – *regardless of family background, grades and college degrees.***

There are programs designed for academically at-risk students which are proven to change the trajectories of these students and combat poverty as they become working adults. I’m proud of our legislature providing above and beyond funds for at-risk students!

For instance, The Calculus Project is a four-year high school project of summer schools for Black, Latino, Indigenous, and low-income students. The summer school begins with two months of math BEFORE they enter the same class in the fall. That way, they know stuff. They feel comfortable and confident. And almost 80% of these students earn an A or B in their first semester of math after the summer program. This project has served over 10,000 students since 2009, and 70% of TCP students enroll in AP level math courses by their senior year.

JAG-K, or Jobs for America’s Graduates-Kansas is another program lauded by Governor Kelly and a favorite of the legislature and the Board of Education. I believe that JAG-K is underutilized by Kansas schools.

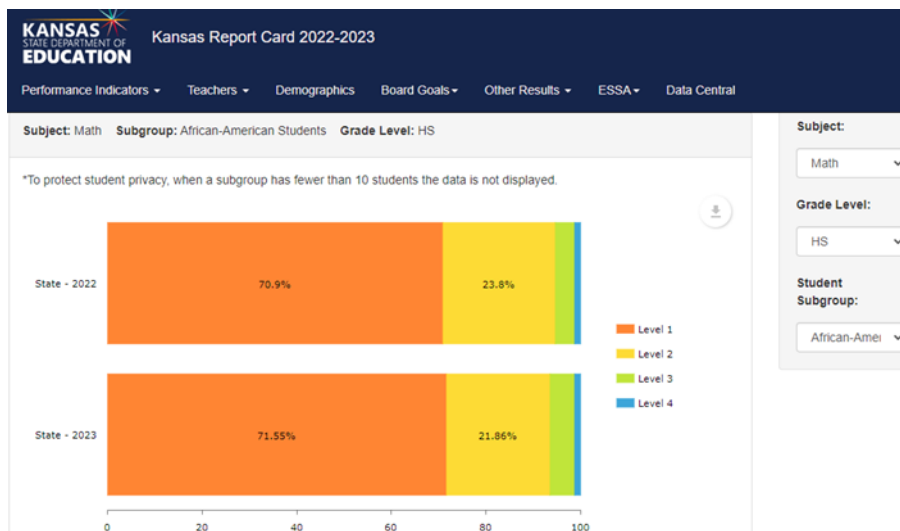
A working paper out last year, [“A Kindergarten Lottery Evaluation of Core Knowledge Charter Schools: Should Building General Knowledge Have a Central Role in Educational and Social Science Research and Policy?”](#) done by the University of Virginia, and funded by U.S. Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, found that an early elementary reading curriculum containing social studies, science, and other broad knowledge topics eliminated the academic gap between low-income students and non-low-income students. Eliminated it. The study was a six-year randomized control study regarding the Core Knowledge Curriculum. And, Core Knowledge is on the KSDE’s existing list of approved at-risk practices.

At the January Board of Education meeting, Dr. Ben Proctor told the Board that KSDE has now finished an audit of the Evidence-Based Approved At-Risk Programs list, and has counted the number of compliant programs out of the 272 programs on the list. However, the old list, which is currently available on their website, still contains entries such as “student discussions” and “co-teaching” approved as “above and beyond” programs to be paid for with at-risk funds. Schools are unsure whether to put their resources into something on a list so old that the Department has had to put an asterisk and warning by seventeen entries on the list which are not Science of Reading compliant.

The LPA audit provided proof that targeted spending has benefits.

HB2650 puts teeth into the at-risk statute so that it can do the good work that your education committee designed it to do.

Thank you for supporting HB2650 and for reading my testimony.



The orange bar (Level 1 = “limited ability”), together with the yellow bar (Level 2 = “basic ability”) have been deemed by KSDE and the Kansas Supreme Court as “not proficient.” Our Department of Education Commissioner, Dr. Randy Watson defines “Academically Prepared” as being Levels 3 and 4, as do the KSDE’s Accreditation Reports.