



House Committee on K-12 Education Budget  
Kristey Williams, Chair  
February 5, 2024  
Susan Willis, Chief Financial Officer  
USD 259 - Wichita Public Schools

Chair Williams and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in opposition of HB2650. USD 259 is the largest district in Kansas, providing educational services to over 47,000 students annually. As of today, 37,627 of those students have been identified as needing some sort of intervention services, or “above and beyond” educational services as identified in this bill. Please consider that number throughout this testimony – 37,627 students each with individual academic deficits, individual social and behavior health needs, individual home circumstances that are uncontrollable factors in academic success, individual attendance records, and even individual languages of origin spoken in homes. Our at-risk population alone is bigger than any other district in Kansas.

Additionally, our free meals population as a “sub-group” totals 32,686 – audited. Even segregating by grade level, this could be 70% or more students in a single third grade classroom for one classroom teacher to track all the interventions, or “above and beyond” strategies, used to improve outcomes for students. That is 14 out of 20 students in one classroom in just the one mandatory subgroup. Multiply that by 54 elementary locations x 2, 3 or 4 sections per grade level. What system would be put into place to track such data? Would KSDE provide such a system? How would it be audited?

And, once again, the bulk of this workload will fall to teachers. At a time where recruiting teachers into the profession is extremely challenging (over 150 teaching vacancies), when teachers already feel the burden of data tracking for a host of other requirements, we would add yet another task to the overflowing teacher plate.

Additionally, reducing funding for school districts should they “fail to meet or exceed the quantitative academic improvement goal established by the school district board of education” is the exact opposite of what every study the legislature has requested in the past 20 years related to at-risk students has stated is necessary for outcomes to improve for at-risk students. There are so many factors that schools have limited ability to impact, including:

USD 259 has a mobility rate of almost 19%. Our high schools are running at about 22.46%, and middle schools run 20.18%. How does longitudinal tracking and responsibility work when that student changes schools 3 times during the school year? Leaves USD 259 and comes back, like many of our foster children and homeless children do?

USD 259 has a chronic absenteeism rate of 31.47% for the first semester, 2023. This was a 5.19% improvement over first semester, 2022. However, that is still 31.47% of our population are on track to miss more than 10% of the school year. Any research-based intervention requires frequency and consistency. Students not in school will not see the same level of benefits as their regular-attending peers.

USD 259 has over 100 para vacancies and turnover is over 10% in this group. Any research-based intervention requires staff trained on the intervention. Even if we could fill every vacancy, we would still struggle with regular patterns of intervention delivery.

While USD 259 agrees with the intent behind the bill, which is accountability for growth in our at-risk student population's academic outcomes, we are opposed to the implementation this bill as written and the punitive fiscal measures included when we really need more state and community support for our 37,627 at-risk students. We respectfully ask the committee to consider the magnitude of our challenge and not advance this bill.