



March 7, 2012

Good Afternoon:

I am Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent of Topeka Public Schools, and I am here to advocate for the patrons of Shawnee County, especially the students in our school district. Our urban district has 14,000 students, of which 77% are free and reduced lunch, 14% Special Education, and 8% ELL.

The School Board of Topeka Public Schools adopted formal legislative positions for the first time this year. I have attached our platform that sets priorities for our district as guidance for Kansas policymakers as they make decisions that will impact students and the families that we serve. We are encouraged by the bipartisan proposal that is presented in SB 450 by this Senate Education Committee's leadership. We see this as a positive step toward adequately and equitably funding education in Kansas by restoring cuts in state funds imposed in recent years.

Topeka Public Schools feels the current formula is sound for two main reasons:

- The formula considers the link between urban poverty and low student achievement. Weightings are critical to Topeka Public Schools to suitably address the wide array of educational needs for the students that we serve in our district.
- The formula considers inflation. One of our biggest concerns with the Governor's proposal is the fact that there are no true new options for funding, other than student growth. Moreover, the 7.5% cash balance requirement would have crippled our ability to make prudent financial decisions to properly educate our students and efficiently and responsibly maximize and expend our resources in the best interests of our taxpayers.

This bipartisan effort moves the state toward restoring the devastating cuts to public education that have impacted the quality of Kansas' education system, while still allowing the desire of some districts to raise local monies to invest in their local schools. Of most importance, this new option to raise local funds is equalized in order to preserve equal access to quality education no matter what the property values are in the district in which they reside.

Topeka Public Schools is currently at 30% of the Local Option Budget. We had been able to hold our citizens harmless from property tax increases; however after several years of the state not adequately funding the formula, we were forced to begin to raise the mill levy last year. We are willing to accept a plan that allows for increases in the Local Option Budget in stages, but we remain committed to the state's adherence to the current formula, which balances the burden on local taxpayers with other state revenue sources.

We are encouraged by the bipartisan effort in this bill. It is time that we work together to maintain and improve the educational system for students in Kansas: a system that will train the next generation of Kansas workers and create jobs in Kansas that grow our economy. This can only be accomplished by providing all students with equitable opportunities to build skills that will make them employable and successful, whether they are in rural or urban Kansas or from rich or poor families.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Julie Ford, Superintendent
Topeka Public Schools, USD 501

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