

February 12, 2013  
Senate Education Committee  
Attn: Chairman Abrams and Committee  
RE: Senate Bill 103  
Testimony in Opposition

I am presenting written testimony today in opposition to Senate Bill 103. Hutchinson Public Schools has 67 percent of our population who receive free and reduced lunch. Of those, 2827 students are free, representing 53.86% of our headcount. According to calculations from KSDE, Hutchinson's at-risk students would lose an estimated 1.5 million dollars in support services they now receive in at-risk funding. This also represents a 5% reduction in our general fund, so it is no small impact to the educational programming the students receive.

Senate Bill 103 is flawed for several reasons. First, it focuses on a single indicator in the form of the Kansas Assessments. There are a number of at-risk issues that face today's students, and risk of academic failure is but one of those. As one example, Hutchinson has several programs funded by at-risk dollars that help teenage mothers graduate from high school – many of these are bright girls who are proficient on the state assessments but still at risk of dropping out. Another example would be the 5<sup>th</sup> grader I mentor through Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Although she scores exemplary on her state assessments, she ran away from home last year. Because of her school counselor had time to work with parents to put her in touch with a network of wrap-around services, this little girl is back on track and doing well. It would have been a travesty if she had to slip to below proficient before resources were available to help her! Students come to us with a variety of emotional and behavioral issues that may not impact their performance on the Kansas Assessments, but may ultimately interfere in their ability to graduate from high school to become a productive member of our society. As evidence of this fact, while Hutchinson's free and reduced student performance on Kansas Assessments has improved since 2008, our graduation rate for free and reduce students has not. The "gap" graduation rate between free and reduced students vs. their full-pay classmates has grown by 4.7 percentage points. Using Kansas Assessments as the single measure of at-risk is insufficient and will leave many students un-served. Free lunch has been shown through research to be the best predictor of risk of failure in school.

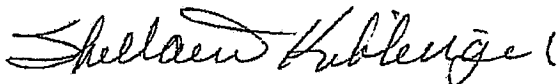
The second major flaw with this bill is that it is reactive, not proactive. The current system allows us to predict who may be at-risk of failure and intervene before the students are seriously behind. By waiting until students have become so far behind that they are failing the state assessments, we are treating the problem rather than preventing it. Prevention always costs less and is more effective than waiting until after a problem has occurred! This is true in home maintenance, health care, and it's true in education as well!

The 1.5 million dollars our students would lose under S.B. 103 represent vital services. Over 30 teachers and classroom aides are represented in this amount. Many districts use at-risk funding to support all-day kindergarten, although the revenue generated in the primary grades will does not cover this entire costs in most districts. To be proactive, Hutchinson puts a greater percentage of at-risk funds in the lower grade levels. Even though SB 103 does not change how funding is calculated for the primary

grades, the loss of 1.5 million in our district would likely mean the end of all-day kindergarten and classroom aides at these grade levels, where class sizes are 29 students, because we would need those funds to provide intervention services at grades 3-12. Other at-risk services reduced would include counselors, our last remaining school resource officer, and a social worker. Hutchinson, like many districts, uses at-risk dollars to keep class sizes lower in core classes where at-risk students are present. We would be forced to end this practice and increase class sizes. The loss of these pro-active interventions over time, will likely increase the number of failing students over time, which will drive up educational costs in the long-run.

A third concern is that "proficiency" on the state assessments is not a sufficient measure of what students need to be college and career ready. I believe there is a level of truth in some of the attacks on public education presented by the Kansas Policy Institute. They do not believe "proficient" is a sufficient reading level for Kansas students, and I agree with them. The lexile level required of students in other states to be proficient on their assessments is higher than that required by current Kansas reading assessments. Thus, accepting proficiency as the measure by which you cut off at-risk funding will likely leave many students unprepared for college or meaningful careers. The Common Core State Standards and the associated assessments will require a higher level of skill than that currently required by our assessments. Thus, now is not the time to use state assessments as the sole measure of at-risk.

The final concern with SB 103 is that its reactive nature will cause a roll-coaster of funding levels, which creates a system of inefficient and inconsistent programming. By waiting until students fail to intervene, money will be reduced, students will start to fail, money will be added to the district students will improve, only to have funding decreased, programs reduced, and the cycle will start again. Schools will not be able to predict what the following year will look like and will be unable to make long-term funding commitments to staff in proven intervention programs. Instead, they may invest their funds in less effective materials that are more easily cut when budgets fluctuate wildly. This is not an efficient way to plan for effective educational programs, and it is not the way to meet the diverse needs of the students of our state.



Respectfully submitted by Shellaine Kiblinger, Ed.D.  
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