

Jeremy LaFaver
Alliance for Childhood Education
22052 West 66th Street, Suite 200
Shawnee, KS 66226

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Testimony for the House K-12 Budget Committee
HB 2270 – Education Finance Act
SUPPORT

The Alliance for Childhood Education (ACE) is pleased to be before you today in support of HB 2270 because this legislation appropriately recognizes the importance of early childhood education by fully funding all-day Kindergarten and by increasing investments in programs to help at-risk 4 year-olds.

Our organization is made up of business leaders and executives throughout the region who have a vested interest in making sure our schools are preparing a workforce that is second-to-none. And, as business owners and taxpayers, they also want to make sure this is done in the most financially efficient way possible. It was the late Frederick Douglass who said it best when he said “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” I’d also like to add, as you contemplate the state’s finances, it’s a lot cheaper too.

Kansas is now tasked with writing a school finance plan that achieves two things. 1. It must be equitable, and 2. It must provide the necessary resources our students need in order to achieve specific outcomes (Rose Standards). Funding full-day kindergarten and investing in at-risk 4 year-olds helps accomplish both, and it does so in a manner that is also being responsible with the taxpayers’ money.

In terms of equity, the system that Kansas currently has for Kindergarten is inequitable. Some kids have full-day kindergarten and some do not. Some that do have it are required to pay extra money for it, while neighbors in other districts do not. A reasonable argument clearly exists that the current method is inequitable. By funding full-day Kindergarten in every district, this argument (at least) disappears.

In addition to helping achieve equity, ACE also believes that funding full-day Kindergarten and increasing investments in at-risk 4 year-olds helps make sure we get our desired education outcomes. Kansas has chosen the Rose Standards as our “finish line”. The Rose Standards have established a set of outcomes or “capacities”, with the very first being “Sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization”. I believe they put this one first because you can’t have the rest without this foundation.

A mountain of research exists that shows how investing in quality early childhood education leads to better communication skills. And we know that children who read at or above grade level by the 3rd grade are much more likely to succeed later in school and in life.

Research aside, we've seen it firsthand here in Wichita, Kansas with The Opportunity Project, a program that provides early education to children living in poverty. According to the Alvarez & Marsal study, this program alone has saved the state \$4.5 million by avoiding special education placement for the children who attend the program for 2 years, an 11 percent annual return on investment (A&M Study, p 119).

Another often-cited longitudinal study done in Indiana showed that students in full-day kindergarten scored higher test scores in the third, fifth and seventh grades than students who attended half-day or no Kindergarten at all. (*"The Effects of Full Day Versus Half Day Kindergarten: Review and Analysis of National and Indiana Data"*
<http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/kindergarten/fulldaykreport1.pdf>)

And in a massive study of over 17,000 students in Philadelphia, researchers found that "by the time they reached the third and fourth grades, former full-day kindergartners were more than twice as likely as children without any kindergarten experiences—and 26 percent more likely than graduates of half-day programs—to have made it there without having repeated a grade." (*"Enhancing Urban Children's Early Success in School: the Power of Full-Day Kindergarten"*, Andrea Del Gaudio Weiss, Ph.D and Robert M. Offenber, Ed.D., School District of Philadelphia.)

Simply put, we know that when we invest in early education we get better outcomes, and we do it at a fraction of the cost.

There is a lot to unpack with this formula. And, having helped the state of New Mexico re-write their formula almost 10 years ago myself, I know the task is certainly daunting and you have many tough choices to make about this weighting or that weighting.

However, there is one clear easy choice for you to make when you re-write the formula. And that is to make the smart investments in programs for at-risk 4 year-olds and to also fund full-day kindergarten. Doing so is equitable, it helps achieve results, and it does it while being a good steward of taxpayer dollars.