

**Senate Education Committee
At Risk Funding
February 4, 2020
Kathy Johnson, Executive Director Finance
Lawrence USD 497**

Dear Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input about at-risk and high density at-risk funding and its importance and use in Lawrence USD 497.

The purpose of the Kansas At-Risk Program is to provide at-risk students with additional educational opportunities, interventions, and evidence-based instructional practices to assist in meeting Kansas State Board of Education outcomes.

At risk funding is critical to Lawrence USD497's mission to ensure educational equity and excellence so that students of all races and backgrounds achieve at high levels and graduate prepared for success in college, careers and life in a diverse and rapidly changing world. Students identified as at-risk require supplemental supports to ensure that they achieve, succeed and graduate future-ready.

Students come to school with a wide range of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional strengths and needs. To serve these students well, schools need to align supports and services in ways that address the individual needs of each student. Lawrence uses a comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered (CI3T) model of prevention as a proactive approach to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students. The CI3T model aims to prevent and respond effectively to the development of learning and behavioral challenges through tiers of support.

Lawrence has a diverse and transient student population. On average, 8.6% of the district's K-12 student population turns over from year to year. In 2018-2019 Lawrence experienced an in-migration of 969 new students and an out-migration out of 923. We had similar numbers for 2017-2018. In addition, several of our schools have a high percentage of English Language Learners who speak 63 different native languages. This layers on additional challenges for some of our schools.

Excluding the district's virtual school, 30.26% of the district's students qualify for free lunch. Within our schools this ranges from 6.53% to 53.46%. As a result, in addition to at-risk funding, Lawrence also receives building high density at-risk funding generated from schools with populations that are greater than or equal to 35% free lunch qualifiers.

Lawrence uses the at-risk funding it receives in a number of ways to directly support students identified as at-risk and provide them with the supports they need.

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Use of at-risk funding:

- Elementary students identified as below-proficient in math and reading receive paraprofessional support supervised by licensed staff, evidence-based instruction and at-risk best practices approved by the Kansas State Board of Education.
- Elementary instructional coach that supports teachers and paraprofessionals, providing and demonstrating classroom instructional strategies and evidence-based instructional practices.
- English Language Learners require supplemental instruction and supports provided by certified teachers and paraprofessionals. At-risk funding covers costs these costs in excess of what bilingual weighting funds support. The percentage of ELL students identified in our schools range from .48% to 43.20%, and currently 63 native languages are spoken.
- Credit Recovery for high school students
- At-Risk Early Childhood costs in excess of at-risk 4-Year-Old Funding
- Tiered staffing ratios support lower class sizes for schools with high- need student populations with academic, behavior and mental health challenges. These schools most often mirror our buildings with the highest percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- A portion of classroom teacher salaries based on the number of at-risk students identified as below proficient in math and reading. The teacher must be using evidence-based best practices in the classroom.

Without at-risk and high density at-risk funding provided through the school finance formula, it would be difficult, if not impossible for Lawrence USD 497 to meet the unique needs of all of its students, especially those identified as at-risk. Lawrence strives to provide differentiated instruction through a multi-tier system of supports delivered within the general education setting whenever possible. This funding is a necessary resource in making that happen. Lawrence USD 497, with guidance from Kansas Department of Education, needs maximum flexibility in determining how best to use at-risk funds for the benefit of at-risk students in our schools.

Respectfully,
Kathy Johnson, Executive Director Finance
Lawrence USD 497