

SB 271 Neutral Testimony – in person
Repealing sunset provision for high-density at-risk weighting
Senate Education Committee
Dave Trabert, CEO
February 4, 2020



Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Committee,

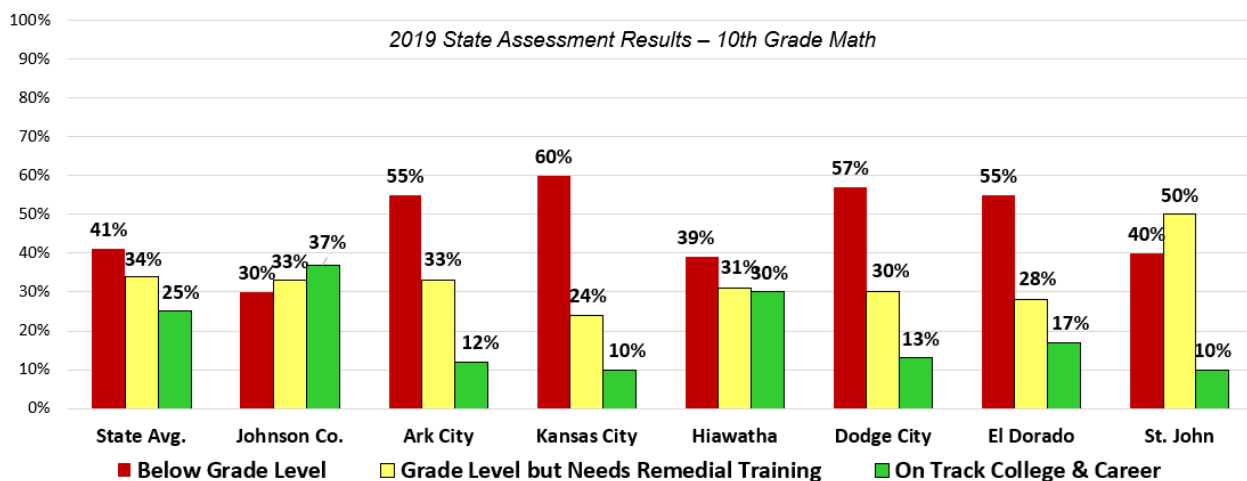
We appreciate this opportunity to provide neutral testimony on repealing the sunset provision for high-density At-Risk funding. We're neutral because the method of funding is a legislative prerogative but we strongly encourage the Committee to add accountability provisions, regardless of what the Committee decides to do with the existing elements of SB 271.

The basis for our recommendation for accountability measures is two-fold; Kansas has persistently low student achievement and school boards won't allocate funding in ways needed to improve overall results and close achievement gaps for low-income kids.

Persistently low student achievement

The Kansas Association of School Boards tells media, legislators, and parents that student achievement is among the top ten in the nation, but unfortunately, that has never been true.

- Kansas is ranked #24 on the ACT, and only 27% of students are considered college-ready in English, Reading, Math, and Science.
- Rankings on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) range from #19 to #34. Less than a quarter of low-income kids are proficient in 4th-grade and 8th-grade reading and math, and less than half of all other students are proficient.
- 41% of 10th-grade students statewide are below grade level in math; 34% are at grade level but still need remedial training, and only 25% are on track for college and career. Even in Johnson County, considered by some to have the best schools in Kansas, 30% are below grade level, 33% are at grade level but still need remedial training, and only 37% are on track for college and career

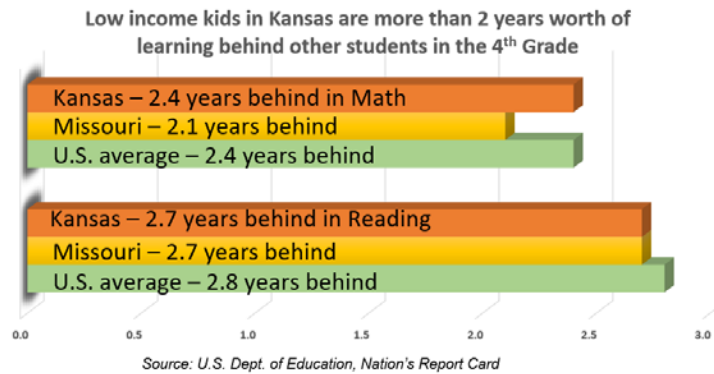


Year after year, achievement on the state assessment declines as students move throughout their years in school, so we know that achievement doesn't suddenly and dramatically improve before graduation. All across Kansas and even in Johnson County, district administrators are graduating kids while knowing that some of them are below grade level. That statement was made at a recent Overland Park Chamber of

Commerce meeting with the superintendents of Olathe and Shawnee Mission in the room. Neither of them said a word in response.

Achievement gaps for low-income students on NAEP are wide and persistent. In 4th-grade math, Kansas' low-income students are 2.4 years' worth of learning behind other students; that's the same as the national average but a little worse than Missouri, which has a 2.1 year gap.

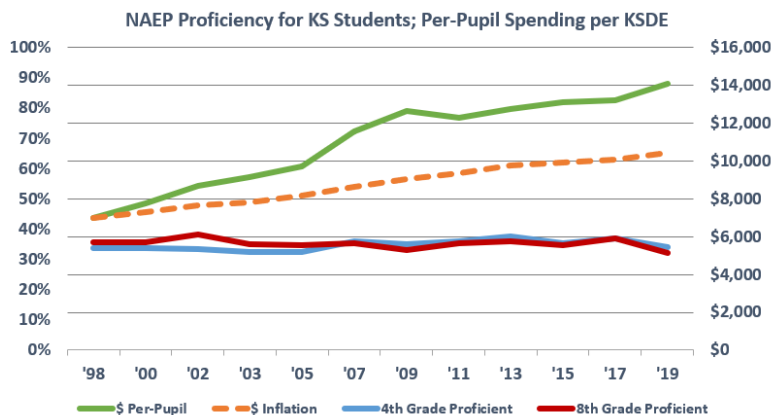
In 4th-grade reading, Kansas' low-income students are 2.7 years' worth of learning behind their more affluent peers. Missouri has the same gap and the U.S. average is 2.8 years.



Administrative resistance to change

Education officials believe lack of funding is the problem even though there's not a shred of evidence showing that more funding causes achievement to improve.

- Some states historically spend less per-pupil than Kansas and get the same or better results than Kansas on NAEP.¹
- Florida spends about \$3,000 less per-pupil than Kansas but did better on six of the eight primary comparisons on the 2019 NAEP; there was one tie, and Kansas did better on one measurement.
- As shown below, reading proficiency for Kansas 4th-grade and 8th-grade students declined between 1998 and 2019 while per-pupil spending increased far beyond inflationary change. Spending would have gone from about \$7,000 to \$10,000 if increased for inflation, but in 2019, spending was more than \$14,000 per student.



A recent Legislative Post Audit study found school districts aren't spending At-Risk funding as required by state law; most of it is spent on other students and not on methods proven to be effective.² The State Board of Education cavalierly responded in the Kansas City Star, basically saying the auditors are wrong, and school districts know what they're doing.³

KBOE President Kathy Busch faults LPA for saying districts aren't following best practices, because she says best practices for At-Risk methods aren't clearly defined, and later in the same paragraph, she says districts *are* following best practices.

Student achievement solutions

Persistently low student achievement, especially for low-income students, is a civil rights issue that won't be resolved without legislative intervention.

- School districts should be required to certify that their budgets allocate sufficient money to Function Code 1000 – Instruction so that students have the opportunity to get to grade level. The Legislature passed a policy goal in 2005, signed by Governor Kathleen Sebelius, asking districts to allocate 65% of total spending to Instruction. At the time, districts allocated 54.2% to Instruction, but it's now down to 52.8%.
- Provide an Education Savings Account (ESA) for any student testing below grade level in English language arts or Math on the state assessment. This 'money-follows-the-child' program would allow parents to decide which public or private school best meets their child's educational needs.
- Provide an ESA for students with disabilities, including dyslexia and related challenges. The McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities provided over 31,000 Florida students with special needs the opportunity to attend a participating private school during the 2018-19 school year. The McKay Scholarship Program also offers parents public school choice.⁴

Conclusion

We encourage the Committee to implement these student-focused accountability measures as part of your work on high-density At-Risk funding, and we thank you for your consideration.

¹ "Make school spending more efficient and effective," Kansas Policy Institute, October 1, 2018. <https://kansaspolicy.org/make-school-spending-more-efficient-and-effective/>

² "K-12 Education: Evaluating At-Risk Student Counts, Weights, and Expenditures," Kansas Legislative Division of Post Audit, December, 2019. <https://www.kslpa.org/audit-report-library/k-12-education-evaluating-at-risk-student-counts-weights-and-expenditures/>

³ "Simplistic report on Kansas at-risk school spending ignores the realities of teaching," by Kathy Busch, president of the Kansas Board of Education. Kansas City Star, December 27, 2019. <https://www.kansascity.com/opinion/readers-opinion/guest-commentary/article238722248.html>

⁴ Florida Department of Education. <http://www.fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/k-12-scholarship-programs/mckay/>